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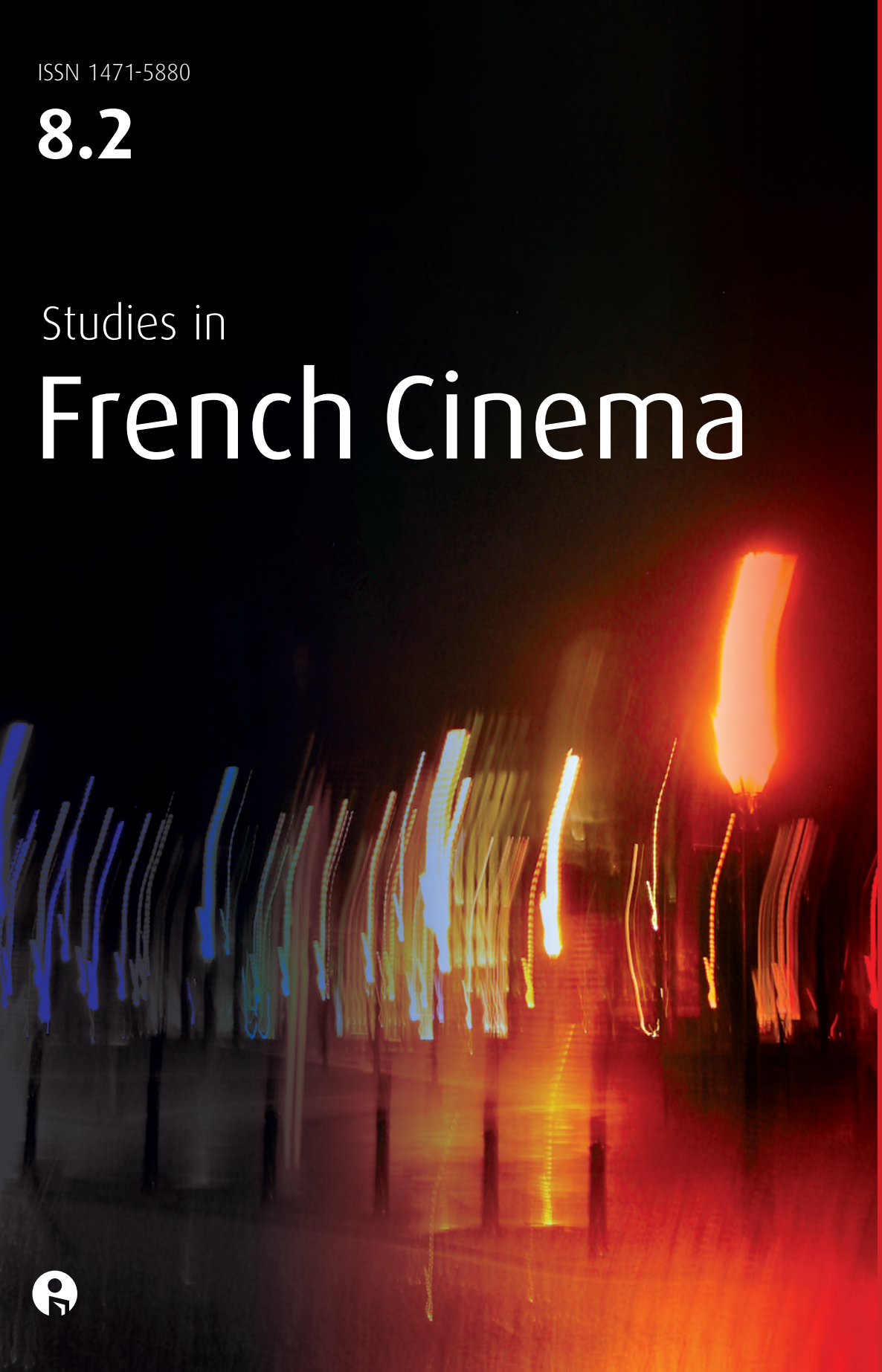
Studies in French Cinema



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Studies in French Cinema

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Studies in French Cinema (SFC) is an academic, refereed publication for scholars, teachers and students from around the world whose focus is on French-speaking Cinema. SFC is published to provide academics and students with a consistent quality of scholarly investigation across the full breadth of the subject, including a focus on largely underdeveloped areas of study and research.

To address this, the Editors especially welcome articles in Film History, Film Genre/Film Trends, and Film Technique/Film Theory. Submissions in French are welcome and will be translated for publication. For submission details and further information, please consult the Intellect website http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/journals.php?issn=14715880

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Contributor Notes

Studies in French Cinema is a peer-reviewed journal. Articles accepted for review are read by the Editors and normally sent out to readers for review. We do not accept articles if they are substantially over 5500 words, notes and references included.

Four general points of presentation should be borne in mind by contributors before drafting an article:

- use Times New Roman 12-point font, double-spaced with ample margins;
- present references within the text;
- translate all French quotations;
- indent paragraphs so that we can distinguish between a paragraph break and a blank line.

Articles should be submitted electronically in a finished state using our detailed presentation guidelines. These can be found on the *Studies in French Cinema* website in a downloadable Word document. The home page is http://www.ncl.ac.uk/crif/sfc/home.htm and the link to the document can be found in the site's Download area: http://www.ncl.ac.uk/crif/sfc/downloads.htm. Articles submitted in non-standard format will not be reviewed.

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Editorial

Susan Hayward and Phil Powrie

News

1. Our annual April conference (2008), generously hosted as always by the French Institute in London, is on **French Cinema before 1940** and its aim is to re-examine some well-worn myths of these foundational decades of French cinema, and to open up new areas for historical investigation (website: http://www.ncl.ac.uk/crif/sfc/conference.htm). We will be presenting the 2007 prizes for best essay at this conference.

   The *Studies in French Cinema*–Intellect Press Undergraduate Prize for best essay has been unanimously awarded to Gabor Gergely (Exeter University) for his essay, 'Jean-Luc Godard's film essays of the 1960s: the virtues and limitations of realism theories' – published in this issue (8:2).

   The *Studies in French Cinema*–MUP Postgraduate Prize for best essay goes to Tomas Williams (Exeter University) for his essay 'Franju's *Les Yeux sans visage*: the masked woman and the national body'.

2. **Please** encourage your postgraduates to apply for the various small grants we offer (see end of journal). And please continue to submit your undergraduate and postgraduate best essays for consideration for prizes. The *Studies in French Cinema*–MUP Postgraduate Prize for 2008 will be announced in the next issue.

This issue

This issue sees the publication of two *SFC* prizes. The **2006 *SFC*–MUP Prize** for best postgraduate essay by Jim Morrissey (London University) – 'Paris and voyages of self-discovery in *Cléo de 5 à 7* and *Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain*' – in which he explores contrasting responses to the city and the **2007 *SFC*–Intellect Prize** for best undergraduate essay by Gabor Gergely (Exeter University) for his essay – 'Jean-Luc Godard's film essays of the 1960s: the virtues and limitations of realism theories' – in which he shows how Godard's films of the 1960s actively engage with and challenge the tenets of realism theories put forward by Siegfried Kracauer and André Bazin.

This issue also completes the series of articles on the body emanating from last year's conference with Markos Hadjioannou's exploration of digital corporeality in Christian Volckman's *Renaissance* (2006).

Three further articles explore issues of subjectivity in different guises. Neil Archer takes Marc Augé's concept of the 'non-lieu' and develops it in relation to Cantet's *L'Emploi du temps* (2001) to show how the road and the car in this film become sites where the male subject simultaneously evades and performs the tasks of familial responsibility. Keith Reader proposes a Deleuzian approach to Resnais *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961) to unravel its sadomasochistic undertones. Finally, Phil Powrie regales us with an unravelling of Pierre Batcheff as a surrealist star.

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Paris and voyages of self-discovery in *Cléo de 5 à 7* and *Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain*

Jim Morrissey *University of London*

Abstract

The scale of the modern city, the pace of life and diversity of lifestyles within it, make it simultaneously a site of excitement and unease. This article explores such contrasting responses to the city by focusing on the protagonists' interactions with Paris in Varda's Cléo de 5 à 7 *and Jeunet's* Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain. *The article suggests that the aesthetic and narrative approaches adopted in these films reflect their directors' contradictory attitudes to the multiplicity of the city. While Varda celebrates the randomness of Paris which she sees as central to its inspirational power, Jeunet fears it. He therefore creates a safer, more controllable Paris which, though attractive within the bounds of his narrative, is unsustainable outside it.*

Keywords

Varda
Jeunet
Cléo de 5 à 7
Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain
Paris
Flânerie

How do we live in cities? How can the individual subject cope with this archetypal modern site 'filled with anarchic juxtapositions, random encounters, multiple sensations and uncontrollable meanings' (Charney 1995: 283)? In *Cléo de 5 à 7*/*Cleo from 5 to 7* (Varda, 1962) and *Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain*/*Amelie* (Jeunet, 2001), the principal characters are confronted with one of the central paradoxes of modern city life.[1] Though they live in the city, surrounded by other people, they feel profoundly alone; they are isolated in the *foule* (throng) that is Paris. Both characters undergo a transformation over the course of their respective films. They manage to progress from isolation and frustration to engagement with others, and, even though their happiness is not guaranteed, both films end with their protagonists being given at least the potential for fulfilment. How does the city inform these voyages of self-discovery? More particularly, what does the physical and mythical space that is 'Paris' contribute to their growing senses of self-awareness? In this essay, in addition to analyzing the different ways in which the protagonists interact with several tangible city spaces – the street, the metro, the bus, the train station, the café and the apartment – I will investigate their responses to a less concrete Paris: the Paris of political involvement and creative inspiration. I hope to show that the films' contrasting aesthetic and narrative approaches are inextricably linked to their directors' contradictory reactions to the often challenging multiplicity of the modern city. I will begin, however, by exploring the relevance of the classical means of coming to terms with Paris and its 'environment of fleeting sensations and ephemeral distractions' (Charney 1995: 279) – *la flânerie*.[2]

1. Hereafter the films will be referred to as *Cléo* and *Amélie*.

2. *Flânerie* is a notoriously difficult term to translate. Some of its nuances will be explored in the paragraphs that follow. In simple terms, however, it means to stroll about idly, conventionally in a city setting.

Figure 1: Cléo (Corinne Marchand) in Cléo de 5 à 7.

Given the extent of Baudelaire's influence on our image and understanding of Paris, it is tempting to call any incidence of strolling around the city *flânerie*. But how reasonable is it to call Cléo (Corinne Marchand, see figure 1) and Amélie (Audrey Tautou) female *flâneurs*, or more correctly, *flâneuses*? Though Sandy Flitterman-Lewis asserts that Cléo is 'a Baudelairean flaneur' [*sic*] (Flitterman-Lewis 1996: 274), on her walk through the Dôme café, controversy surrounds the lone woman walking in the city and her claim to the title *flâneuse*. As Janet Wolff has observed, much of this stems from the fact that female *flânerie* was 'rendered impossible by the sexual divisions of the nineteenth century' (Wolff 1985: 45). Those divisions defined public spaces (like the city street) as spaces for men, while women generally found themselves confined to what might be called private, domestic or female space. A lone, undisguised woman, unable to justify her presence through shopping, could not wander the streets without it being assumed that she was a prostitute. Jill Forbes calls this the inescapable '*mise-en-scène* to which women are subjected', particularly in Paris (Forbes 2002: 89). Forbes concludes that 'though…Cléo is Baudelairean in some respects, it is as object not subject of the gaze' (2002: 86). But have these nineteenth century sexual divisions not lost much of their relevance? And, consequently, by 2001, or even by 1962 (the release dates of our two films), is the *flâneuse* not an eminently possible figure? Already rejecting any perceived need to explain or justify her wanderings, privileging the route over the itinerary just like the *flâneur*, Cléo, to paraphrase Michael Sheringham, is willing to have *her* (my emphasis) 'progress determined by whatever turns up' (Sheringham 1996: 100). She does not decide to visit Dorothée until she overhears her friend's name in the Dôme. She then allows herself to be diverted from her course to observe the 'man piercing his arm'. Furthermore, Cléo's costume change from white dress and wig to more sombre attire prior to her walk through the Dôme does much to counteract what Forbes would call her position as object of the gaze. As Valerie Orpen points out, Cléo casts off the garb of the dandy 'who preferred to be noticed and admired in colourful raiment', and changes into a black outfit 'strongly reminiscent of the nineteenth-century *flâneur*, who did not want to be seen' (Orpen 2007: 75). Cléo becomes not a

Baudelairean object, but a Baudelairean subject 'at the centre of the world, and yet … hidden from the world' (Baudelaire 1986: 9). Shots communicating Cléo's subjective point of view in the Dôme back up Flitterman-Lewis's assertion that the heroine 'ceases to be an object, constructed by the looks of men, and assumes the power of vision, a subjective vision of her own' (Flitterman-Lewis 1996: 269). We might pause here to consider the remarkable extent to which Cléo in the Dôme resembles that pioneer of *flânerie*, Constantin Guys, in Baudelaire's *The Painter of Modern Life*: 'In the window of a coffee house there sits a convalescent, pleasurably absorbed in gazing at the crowd … rapturously breathing in all the odours and essences of life … Finally he hurls himself headlong into the midst of the throng' (Baudelaire 1986: 7).[3]

We might well argue then, with Janice Mouton, that in *Cléo*, Agnès Varda 'lay[s] claim to the activity of *flânerie* for women' (Mouton 2001: 14). On the other hand, and despite the fact that her 'voyage' takes place some forty years later than Cléo's, it is hard to picture Amélie drifting aimlessly through the streets of Paris, to imagine her finding any fulfilment in the fragmented pleasures of *flânerie*. Michelle Scatton-Tessier says that Amélie is 'an active female protagonist on a quest' (Scatton-Tessier 2004: 201), and this idea of 'quest' highlights the essential difference between Amélie's approach to the city and that of a *flâneuse* like Cléo. David B. Clarke says that 'the *flâneur* fully embraced the uneasy, fleeting lifeworld of the modern city, enthralled by the pleasures and potentialities of a world removed from the presence, stricture and restraint of tradition, but also from the functional efficacy of modern rationality' (Clarke 1997: 5). Where the *flâneur* delights in the novel, the irrational or the 'fleeting', Amélie's encounters with the Parisian street are characterized by attempts to impose rationality. Her 'quest' to reunite Bretodeau (Maurice Bénichou) with his box of childhood memories is an attempt to render explicable the random potentiality of city life. Bretodeau resembles a *flâneur* as he walks along the street, open enough to random experience to investigate the mysterious call of the public telephone. Yet this is not a random event; its potentiality is reduced to a singularity by Amélie's corruption of the experience of *flânerie*. After the success of this plan, the 'urge to help mankind' that engulfs Amélie prompts her to take a blind man (Jean Darie) on an exhilarating walk along a busy street. Though her lively commentary could be called a celebration of the delicious variety on display, this walk is very different from one that would be undertaken by a *flâneuse*. Firstly, Amélie lacks the critical distance necessary for the 'disaffected pleasure' (Conley 1996: 72) of *flânerie*; her philanthropic motivations make her too involved in the scene to appreciate it passively. Secondly, Amélie is too visible, too physically present, to be called a *flâneuse*. Her commentary and her companion make it impossible for her to be 'hidden from the world' (Baudelaire 1986: 9). Finally, whereas the *flâneur* sees the street as 'an ever changing space' (Sheringham 1996: 92), Amélie's words effectively concretize it. As soon as she says 'at the butcher's, a baby's watching a dog that's watching the chickens roasting', their gazes are fixed, they cannot look elsewhere. Amélie's attempts to bring order to the street mean that its random potentiality is less likely to inform her voyage of self-discovery than it was for Cléo, *la flâneuse*.

3. Guys' enthusiasm for life around him in the café is intimately related to his recent return 'from the valley of the shadow of death' (Baudelaire 1986: 7). Cléo is also on the road to recovery, but she will not be made aware of this until her conversation with the doctor in the last moments of the film.

The substantial and symbolic importance of the barricades during the insurrections of 1848, 1871 and 1968 underlines the key role that the Parisian street has played in French political life. Indeed, Eric Hobsbawm has suggested that the very physical layout of the streets of Paris has worked to encourage and facilitate political protest (Hobsbawm 1994: 233). Varda and Jeunet's willingness to depict their characters' engagements with the random potentiality of these streets through *flânerie* bears witness to their conflicting opinions regarding Paris's continuing relevance as a site of political inspiration. *Flânerie* clearly has radical potential; Walter Benjamin calls it a 'protest against the division of labour which makes people into specialists' (Benjamin 1983: 54). But is the *flâneur*'s capacity to protest not seriously compromised by his concealment, by his taking 'refuge in the shadow of the city' (Sheringham 1996: 98), as well as by his isolation in a 'self-defined and self-centred aesthetic spacing' (Clarke 1997: 4)? In political terms, then, must the *flâneur* not be called conservative or even impotent, rather than radical? Elizabeth Wilson would seem to agree, seeing in nineteenth-century *flânerie* a reactionary response to 'a crisis in masculinity brought about by modernity' (in Clarke 1997: 5). Clarke expands on Wilson's position: 'The *flâneur*'s existence was marked by melancholic nostalgia for a lost (or impossible) world, and by a sense of impotence at the interminable deferral of any sense of arrival at a final destination' (1997: 5). I think that *Cléo* goes some way to reinvigorating *flânerie* by presenting a heroine who overcomes what Engels called 'the brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest' (in Williams 1985: 216) characteristic of large cities. For Varda does not present *flânerie* as an end in itself; it is but an intermediate stage, a 'stepping stone', in Cléo's journey between narcissistic self-obsession and politically meaningful contact with others. The major political event that haunts Varda's film is the Algerian War of Independence. During the taxi ride to the rue Huyghens the spectre of the war is raised in the radio news bulletin and, more subtly, in Varda's focus on the African statuary which evokes *Les Statues meurent aussi*/*Statues Also Die* (Marker and Resnais, 1953), a film which as Emma Wilson notes, was banned for fifteen years by the French authorities for what they correctly identified as its anti-colonialist intent (2006: 22). The tragedies of Algeria appear not to register with Cléo, obsessed as she is with her own mortality. Later, however, Cléo becomes intensely aware of life outside of herself, and on her walk through the Dôme she overhears a conversation about the war. Given the state of flux she finds herself in, the words 'you don't know where you stand' are deeply resonant. Cléo, as *flâneuse*, remains isolated but as she moves towards her meetings with Dorothée (Dorothée Blank) and Antoine (Antoine Bourseiller) she 'begins to realise the importance of an intrinsic social connectedness' (Flitterman-Lewis 1996: 38). The meeting with Antoine and the relationship of unforced honesty that begins offers a marked contrast to the flamboyant theatricality of Cléo's earlier meeting with José (José Luis de Villalonga). Antoine's intense vitality serves to sharpen the fears he expresses of dying for nothing. Cléo's obsession with her own mortality transforms itself into fear for Antoine, a fear that might perhaps grow into concern for, and anger on behalf of, all of those who find themselves involved in the Algerian war. This process marks Cléo's

Figure 2: Amélie (Audrey Tautou), her father (Rufus), and the well-travelled gnome in Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain.

progression from the personal to the political via a distinctly Vardean version of *flânerie*.

As I have already noted, Amélie is not hidden or detached like the *flâneur*. Going out of her way to help those around her, Amélie, like Cléo, works to refute the 'brutal indifference' of the modern city. Unlike Cléo, however, Amélie seems far less likely to move from the personal to the political; her various quests focus on the problems faced by particular individuals rather than those of broader social groups. The solutions that Amélie devises are ingeniously tailored to individual circumstances and have no relevance to more generalized social ills. The reconstructed letter and the globetrotting gnome provide welcome (though surely temporary) relief for Madame Wallace (Yolande Moreau) and Monsieur Poulain (Rufus), but they are of no help to others suffering from alcoholism or depression (see figure 20). Very rarely does Amélie encounter the real Paris afflicted as it is with racial and religious division, socio-economic hardship and crime (Scatton-Tessier 2004: 199). Scatton-Tessier suggests that Amélie's 'quick-fixes', her repeated focus on 'that which can be quickly rectified, … implies a diversion from the larger [social and political] issues' (2004: 197). Where the *flâneur* took 'refuge in the shadow of the city' (Sheringham 1996: 98), Amélie takes refuge in an unreal city. Denied the role of *flâneuse*, unable to meet the city on its own terms, Amélie only sees in Paris what she wants to see. To be more precise, Amélie only sees in Paris what Jeunet allows her to see. In Amélie's desire to achieve repeated closure through individualized 'happily ever afters', she distances herself from the *flâneur* and moves closer to the related figure of the detective (Benjamin 1983: 40–46). This association with the forces of order, along with the film's and its heroine's tendency to distract attention from more important issues, partly explain Serge Kaganski's by now infamous charge that the film is 'deeply reactionary' and 'totally disconnected from contemporary reality' (2001). This is clearly an exaggeration, if only in the sense that Amélie's frustration with the media frenzy surrounding the death of 'Lady Di' is a pertinent reflection on one of the root causes of contemporary political apathy: the

obsession with celebrity. Though Jeunet is clearly pessimistic about Paris's continuing ability to inspire political thought or action, the facts are not on his side. The crowds that congregated on the streets of Paris during the 2007 French Presidential elections confirm that the French capital remains an important seat of political awareness and engagement.[4] Had Amélie, as *flâneuse* or otherwise, been allowed to enter this real Paris, would she not have been far more likely to take the step from personal to political?

If the city of Paris has encouraged political involvement down the years it is even better known for the inspiration it has offered to artists of all disciplines. Christopher Prendergast writes of 'the ancient association of the city with the ideal of humanitas, the city as a centre of learning, good manners, civilisation, culture' (1992: 29). Forbes calls Cléo's itinerary 'a compendium of the literary and artistic Paris *topoi*' (Forbes 2002: 88), and Cléo seems to encounter examples of almost all forms of artistic expression on her voyage through the city. She sees sculpture in the Latin Quarter (the African statuary) and later in the Académie where Dorothée poses. As well as overhearing conversations about Picasso and Miró in the Dôme, Cléo looks at some of the paintings that adorn its walls. She goes to the cinema and is shown a short silent film featuring Jean-Luc Godard and Anna Karina, a film clearly set and made in Paris. Paris is an inspiration for all these artists, just as it is for Cléo's songwriters who come to her apartment to let her hear their new compositions. They are dismissive of Cléo's talent; Bob (Michel Legrand), the piano player, says 'Your voice? Don't make me laugh.' Yet, she demonstrates her skill as a singer in the powerful rendition of 'Cry of love', a moment that Flitterman-Lewis highlights as key in Cléo's transformation from object to subject (Flitterman-Lewis 1996: 270). Varda's sharp zoom

4. Nicolas Sarkozy's election as Président de la République was greeted by rioting at the Bastille while, simultaneously, his triumphant supporters gathered around the Place de la Concorde for a celebratory concert (Chrisafis 2007).

Figure 3: Amélie (Audrey Tautou) and Dufayel (Serge Merlin) scrutinize Renoir's 'Luncheon of the boating party' in Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain.

out from Cléo's face as the song ends shows that she is separated from the others in the apartment by the non-diegetic full orchestral accompaniment instead of the diegetic piano. Cléo's emotional investment in the performance, evidenced by her tears, means that she creates a whole new level of meaning, one that affects even her. By the closing bars, Cléo really feels 'ashen, pale and alone' in the company of these sycophants. The song creates in Cléo a new awareness of her loneliness and it prompts her to go out into Paris, a site so rich in inspiration that it is bound to yield a remedy.

Amélie's Paris is very different from the vibrant seat of creativity depicted in Varda's film. There is a painter, old Dufayel (Serge Merlin), but he does not create anything new. Instead, every year, he 'pathologically repaints' (Scatton-Tessier 2004: 204) a new copy of Renoir's 'Luncheon of the boating party' (see figure 3). Indeed, most of the characters in *Amélie* exhibit obsessive behaviour: in the café alone, the psychopathic fascination Joseph (Dominique Pinon) holds for Gina (Clotilde Mollet) exists alongside the hypochondria of Georgette (Isabelle Nanty). Scatton-Tessier says that 'a sense of control and security comes from an obsessive mastering of ordinary situations' (2004: 200). Characters develop their obsessions, then, because of a perceived lack of control and security. Modern, multicultural Paris does not inspire them like it does the artists in *Cléo*; it confuses them. In this situation 'people do not create, but recreate, reconstruct and rearrange' (Scatton-Tessier 2004: 204). Nino (Mathieu Kassovitz) is the classic example. Elizabeth Ezra calls him 'an archivist … [who] like Agnès Varda's *glaneuse* … saves things from oblivion' (Ezra 2004: 305). He obsessively collects the fragments of discarded photos, meticulously reconstructs them and places them in an album. His *glanage* (gleaning) is a refusal to accept the fleeting nature of the modern city, where, in the words of Karl Marx, 'all that is solid melts into air' (in Wolff 1985: 38). Unlike Varda's *glanage*, however, which in *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*/*The Gleaners and I* (Varda, 2000) leads to meaningful contact with others, Nino's *glanage* is a substitute for it. His album reconstructs Paris, making it solid, readable and safe, just like Jeunet's digital reconstruction of the city. However, by digitally erasing 'graffiti, dog shit and other such unsightly items' (Vincendeau 2001), by hiding all of the negative aspects of Paris, such as 'pollution, traffic, poverty, racial disharmony, corruption' (Austin 2004: 289), by making the city predictable, has Jeunet not deprived it of its life-force? There is no inspiration left for the characters that inhabit this meticulously planned, sterilized vision of Paris. Kaganski refers to the vibrancy of the *quartier* around the Canal St Martin, peopled by a variety of races, nationalities and sexualities (Kaganski 2001), but, in *Amélie*, the area appears deserted. The canal sequence begins with a shot taken from over Amélie's head as she stands on the lock. The camera rotates clockwise before dropping down to show Amélie in the foreground with the soulless walkways behind her, the circular camera movement around the heroine emphasizing her isolation. Alone in this beautiful setting, devoid of the stimulation that other people bring, Amélie is confined to safe Paris, controlled Paris, one that can only inspire mindless activity like 'skimming stones'. While Varda is comfortable with the city's dynamic nature, Jeunet fears it. He needs to construct a safer, more predictable Paris, one that will not lead his characters astray. Varda, by contrast, films the city as it stands

allows Cléo to explore it, confident that she will find inspiration where Jeunet sees only confusion.

Amélie's discomfort with public transport shows that she shares Jeunet's unease regarding the random nature of city life. Benjamin tells us that 'before the development of buses, railroads and trams in the nineteenth century, people had never been in a position of having to look at one another for long minutes and even hours without speaking to one another' (Benjamin 1983: 38). Amélie has not learned to cope with this unnatural situation. In one short sequence on the metro, she is in the foreground as a beggar makes a speech in the background. As Amélie turns around to look at him, the camera jerks violently right and left with the movement of the train, the sideways motion jarring sharply with the rapid flight of the tunnel seen through the carriage window. The sequence communicates a feeling of nausea, enhanced by distorted sound. Another metro carriage scene in *Code Inconnu: Récit incomplet de divers voyages*/*Code Unknown: Incomplete Tales of Several Journeys* (Haneke, 2000) helps to explain Amélie's extreme reaction. There, Anne Laurent (Juliette Binoche) is spat on by a young man in the metro simply because she refuses to entertain his sexual advances. Both scenes demonstrate a profound feeling of unease with public transport in the modern city. Cléo begins with a similar sentiment. She takes taxis whenever possible and, pre-transformation, at the height of her narcissism, she even expresses irritation at having to share her cab with the '*typesse*' ('female') who drives her and Angèle back to the apartment. Post-transformation, it is Antoine who suggests that they take a bus to the hospital. He says that 'it's more fun', and, indeed, this bus does seem extremely pleasant. One can stand outside on the rear deck, and, contra Benjamin, these passengers do talk to one another. Cléo's growing awareness of other people, her 'acceptance of the necessary intersubjectivity that structures all relations of culture' (Flitterman-Lewis 1996: 277) takes her out of the taxi and on to the public bus. Increased traffic volumes and the ubiquity of mobile telephones are but two of the developments that could be said to have reduced the appeal of public transport since the early 1960s. Nevertheless, one could argue that Amélie's distaste for public transport illustrates her inability to interact with other people, and is, hence, something she must overcome. It is therefore telling that, for his closing scene, Jeunet chooses not to place his couple on public transport like Varda; instead, they ride on Nino's private moped. In this regard, and contrary to his general aesthetic approach, Jeunet arguably depicts a more real Paris than Varda, reflecting, rather than romanticizing, the persistent and broadly held distaste for public transport in the modern city.[5]

This, however, is just about as real as Jeunet's Paris gets. Overall, his vision of the city denies its modernity as well as its urbanity. Remembering the shots of Amélie skimming stones on the Canal St Martin, it is not surprising to learn that James F. Austin calls *Amélie*'s Paris 'urban space made into a village' and describes it as 'bucolic, unmarred by modern urban life' (2004: 289). It is surprising, then, that the train station, such a quintessentially modern site, should feature so heavily in Jeunet's film. In *Cléo*, the train station is presented as a key point of transition between the urban and the rural. The country/city boundary is symbolized by the metal

5. Discomfort with or on public transport in the modern city is only likely to have intensified in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on Madrid and London in April 2004 and July 2005 respectively. Similar fears appear not to register with Cléo and Antoine despite the threat posed by FLN bombs in Paris in the early 1960s. This would appear to add weight to my suggestion that Varda romanticizes the experience of taking public transport in the modern city.

chains that surround the station. As Cléo sits outside the Gare Montparnasse waiting for Dorothée, she watches people who have just arrived from the countryside stepping over and under these chains, breaching Parisian defences, staking their claims on the spoils of the city. Varda's brisk editing at this point effectively communicates the newcomers' excitement and fear upon entering Paris. These shots are charged with the energy of a site where old identities can be left behind and new lives begun. By making the Paris of *Amélie* less metropolitan, Jeunet renders the urban/rural divide virtually irrelevant. As a consequence, the Parisian train stations lose their power as important gateways, and all of the energy associated with them is dissipated and lost. No longer the sites of bustling vitality, the stations in *Amélie* are grey and lifeless. Frequently captured in extreme long shot, the stations are often deserted but for Amélie and/or Nino. Rather than celebrating the train station as a site of personal reinvention, of identities in flux, Jeunet's focus on the photo booths emphasizes the importance of concretizing identity at the point of arrival. Indeed, Nino's *glanage* of photos that have been discarded could be read as a refusal to allow old or unwanted identities to be abandoned. For many who arrive in the city from the countryside for the first time, the train station operates like an escape hatch that permits and confirms the transition from constraining rural existence to more liberal urban life.[6] This must have been how it operated for Amélie when she first left her home in the affluent suburbs to live in Paris. By 1997, however, she frequently leaves the city through the Gare du Nord to see her father. Jeunet's rustication of Paris means that there is no escape for Amélie; she can only move from one predictable and constraining site to another. Though Austin calls *Amélie*'s Paris 'bucolic' (2004: 289), it is also infertile; there is a marked absence of families and children. In denying Paris its urbanity, in presenting us with a city indistinct from rural space where self-definition or redefinition is much less possible, Jeunet's vision is that of a city with no future, a city that will die.

Jeunet's blurring of urban and rural continues in his portrayal of 'that emblematic Parisian space, the café' (Vincendeau 2001). Wilson writes as follows:

> What distinguishes great city life from rural existence is that we constantly brush against strangers; we observe bits of the 'stories' men and women carry with them, but never learn their conclusions; life ceases to form itself into epic or narrative, becoming instead a short story, dreamlike, insubstantial or ambiguous.
>
> (Wilson 1992: 107)

There is little ambiguity to the stereotypical characters that people Les Deux Moulins. One short sequence establishes their positions in the café, in terms of both hierarchy and location, as well as their professions, likes and dislikes. They are unable to break out of their allotted roles; the end of Georgette and Joseph's short lived affair sees them reverting to the labels under which they were introduced: 'hypochondriac' and 'rejected lover'. The café has none of the insubstantiality Wilson associates with the city; the characters within it and their predetermined narratives would seem

6. Interestingly, priests and/or nuns are depicted in the environs of the train stations of both films, perhaps symbolizing the more traditionally rural values that tend to be abandoned at these points of entry into what Benjamin might call the 'phantasmagoria' of the city (Prendergast 1992: 30).

more appropriately located in an incestuous rural village where everybody knows everybody else's business, where anonymity and mystery are impossible. Even when Georgette and Joseph have sex, everybody knows about it immediately. Les Deux Moulins is a paralysing space, as Amélie finds when she invites Nino to come there. As a character that represents a potentially dynamic future, one of progression and development rather than stagnation, Nino is totally out of place in the café, and he ends up fleeing it in frustration. The Café Dôme which Cléo visits, as I have argued, as *flâneuse,* is very different. Its large and complicated layout contrasts with the straightforward space of Les Deux Moulins, an aid rather than a bar to urban anonymity. As the camera follows Cléo through the café we pick up 'bits' of the stories that she overhears. We hear a baby's cry alongside a conversation on the precursors of surrealism. The speakers are shown very briefly, the quick cutting between them emphasizing the number and variety of people in the café. Perhaps most tellingly, one woman speaks of 'all these stories we simply can't understand'. The Dôme is the type of 'great city' space that Wilson identifies, where life refuses the constraints of narrative that rural existence would impose on it. For Cléo, this café is a space where she can move away from the objectification that has defined her and towards a new 'ambiguous' vision of herself.

The protagonists of both films are oppressed in their domestic spaces and need to break out of them before their self-actualization can proceed. Wilson notes that while, in the nineteenth century, women may have been confined to domestic spaces, those spaces were, nevertheless, 'organized for the convenience, rest and recreation of men' (Wilson 1992: 98). Though Flitterman-Lewis calls Cléo's unusual home 'a fulminating world of the archetypal feminine' (1996: 272), the space is clearly organized for male pleasure. Cléo and Angèle speak of nothing but men, and the overly formal announcement, *'Madame, c'est monsieur'*, accompanied by the swell of music as José appears, demonstrates that a male presence is required to make this space complete. Flitterman-Lewis also calls Cléo's apartment 'a veritable panoply of masquerade, vanity, narcissism and femininity' (1996: 272). As it calls for 'masquerade', all of the characters feel the need to perform in the space. Even before their rehearsal begins, the two songwriters dress up and put on a little play for Cléo's benefit. The excessive artificiality of the apartment, in conjunction with its high ceilings and white colouring, makes it seem somehow empty or blank. Cléo flees this false Paris for the real Paris – the street – further associating herself with the *flâneur* whose 'dwelling' was the street (Benjamin 1983: 37). While Cléo's apartment is decidedly outlandish, Amélie's is classically Parisian. Her apartment building is highly reminiscent of a Paris we already know from film. Ginette Vincendeau writes: 'As Amélie opens her window … she could be stepping out of Renoir's *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* (1935) or *Hôtel du Nord* [Carné, 1938]' (Vincendeau 2001). It is also very similar to the first building we see in *Cléo*, housing the Tarot reader's apartment. Unlike Cléo's apartment, with its constant comings and goings, Amélie's home is most certainly 'private space'. She never has visitors and seems to see her apartment as a refuge from the city. The preponderance of red in the space – carpet, walls, cushions, curtains – makes it feel simultaneously safe, warm, and containing, perhaps evocative of the womb. When Nino

enters the apartment and takes Amélie out into the street, she is symbolically reborn through her own doorway. When Amélie and Nino race through Montmartre on his moped, their speed enhanced by fast motion projection, a contrast is established with the previous scene (projected at normal speed) in which the characters are all but stationary. The contrast between these two sequences emphasizes Amélie's passage from a static pre-birth in her apartment to the dynamism of a new life in the city with Nino.

These two directors clearly adopt very different approaches to the portrayal of 'Paris': while Varda is determined to show the city as it is, Jeunet feels a need to create 'Paris', to show it as it could/should be. Are these two aesthetic strategies not fundamentally defined by the directors' opposing reactions to the multiplicity of the modern city? While Varda celebrates the incoherence of the city which she sees as central to its inspirational power, Jeunet fears this randomness which, to his mind, only causes confusion. Their narrative approaches break down along similar lines. Though both films have a predictable endpoint, Cléo, '*à 7*' (at 7) is much less contained by the narrative than Amélie, having fulfilled her '*destin*' (destiny). Varda's film ends somewhat ambiguously with Cléo's illness confirmed and Antoine about to leave. We do not know where Cléo will go from here; just like the conversations she overhears in the Dôme, Varda only gives us a fragment of Cléo – *from 5 to 7*. Of Amélie and Nino's 'happy ending', Ezra writes 'the sheer predictability of their union, the "fabulous" storybook fulfilment of Amélie's "destin", recalls the ending of countless Hollywood films' (Ezra 2004: 309). Jeunet tries to impose a closure that the real city would resist. But his imagined Paris is unsustainable; real Paris starts to break through as in Amélie's trip on the metro. Is Amélie's joy at the end not as due to her being able to escape Jeunet's manipulations as to her newfound romance? Her speed and trajectory in the final scenes on the moped look likely to take her out of frame to the right. Will she be able to leave this paralysing, nostalgic, rural Montmartre, overcome her fears and enter the modern city? If she can, it is there, amongst the 'anarchic juxtapositions' and 'uncontrollable meanings' (Charney 1995: 283) that her voyage of self-discovery, like Cléo's, will begin in earnest.[7]

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Jean-Luc Godard's film essays of the 1960s: the virtues and limitations of realism theories

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Abstract

Godard's films of the 1960s actively engage with and challenge the tenets of realism theories put forward by Siegfried Kracauer and André Bazin. Montage, camera movements, staginess, playfully subversive soundtracks and disjointed narratives are used to problematize Kracauer and Bazin's concept of realism in film. Godard's films show that the long take can be as abstract as a montage sequence, that realistic locations do not enhance realism, that the idea that film is the result of a purely mechanical process is questionable at best, and that a spatial continuum is not essential to the filmic representation of events.

Keywords

Bazin
Godard
Kracauer
realism

> I realised quite recently that the strength of the 'New Wave', if it had an impact at a given time in France, was simply that there were three or four of us who spoke amongst each other about cinema … and the medium of this conversation was the film, rather than the book.[1]
>
> (Godard 1980: 101)

In *Pierrot le fou*/*Mad Pete* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1965), when Ferdinand/Pierrot (Jean-Paul Belmondo) learns that the cigar-smoking gentleman at Mr and Mrs Expresso's party is Samuel Fuller (played by Samuel Fuller), the American film director, he says: 'I have always wanted to know what exactly is cinema'.[2] This question, it seems, was never far from Jean-Luc Godard's mind in the 1960s. Indeed, *Le Mépris*/*Contempt* (Godard, 1963) begins with credits spoken by the director, followed by a quotation which Godard wrongly attributes to Bazin: 'Cinema should substitute to our eyes a world that corresponds to our desires' (Esquenazi 2004: 234). In typical fashion, the misquote utterly subverts the Bazinian ideal of a cinema where the imaginary substitutes for what is real (Bazin 1967a), by suggesting that the camera should replace what is real with a world that mirrors our desires.

This study seeks to explore the complex and often contradictory ways in which Godard engages with theory in his films of the 1960s, especially *Une femme est une femme*/*A Woman is a Woman* (1961), *Le Mépris* and *Pierrot le fou*. I shall argue that these films can be seen as polemic essays on the nature of film, and on realism in film in particular. I shall discuss these films in light of two of the most important works on film and theory of film published by the time of production of these films: Siegfried Kracauer's *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (1960) and André Bazin's critical writings in *Cahiers du cinéma*, subsequently collected and published

1. All translations by the author, except where marked otherwise.
2. The translation offered by the character in the film replaces 'cinéma' with 'the movies'.

Michel Piccoli in Le Mépris.

Brigitte Bardot and Michel Piccoli in Le Mépris.

as *What Is Cinema?* (1958–1965). Where relevant, I shall also analyse *A bout de souffle/Breathless* (Godard, 1959), although it was made shortly before Kracauer's book was published.

Kracauer's book was the first major work on film theory that aimed to create a systematic, comprehensive catalogue of the specific qualities of cinema since Béla Balázs's *Der Sichtbare Mensch (The Visible Man*, 1924), while Bazin's critical works played a crucial role in the emergence of a new generation of film-makers in the 1960s, and in the development of film theory in general. I shall identify sequences within the films which can be interpreted as direct reaction to and counter-argument against specific points made by Kracauer and Bazin. Taking Godard at his word (admittedly a dangerous thing to do) I shall imagine these films as texts on cinema

Brigitte Bardot in Le Mépris.

Brigitte Bardot in Le Mépris.

itself, and discuss them as part of a dialogue between Godard and the two major exponents of realism in film. I shall therefore favour a textual analysis of the films, rather than a close reading of claims about cinema made by Godard in the pages of *Cahiers du cinéma*, or elsewhere, although typically self-contradictory statements, such as 'I don't believe it is a question of shooting in the street or not shooting in the street' (Godard 1980: 92) indicate the director's awareness of Kracauer's ideas, as we shall see later. I shall discuss Godard's use of editing and montage techniques, the direction of actors, diegetic sound, soundtrack and 'commentative sound' (Kracauer 1960: 119). I shall look at the use of locations, and the tragic end, and relate these to specific claims made by Kracauer and Bazin about their 'aesthetic validity' (Kracauer 1960: 37). I shall also look at

Godard's argument about Bazin and Kracauer's preference for an aesthetic that allows the viewer to ponder the image, thereby revealing a truth untainted by artifice, which Kracauer terms 'virgin indeterminacy' (1960: 69), and Bazin 'virginal purity' (Bazin 1967a: 15) of the image.

When discussing the 'inherent affinities' of film, Kracauer argues that films must be edited in such a way that coherence of action and continuum of space are maintained (Kracauer 1960: 60–74). Bazin agrees, arguing that 'certain situations can only be said to exist cinematographically to the extent that their spatial unity is established' (Bazin 1967b: 52). Godard clearly disagrees. His films abound in sequences where his primary purpose seems to be to disorientate the audience by deconstructing space, and editing the film in such a manner as to remove all elements that could help the viewer in constructing an internal map of the space of action, by reducing both action and the duration of shots to a bare minimum. In *A bout de souffle*, the scene of Michel Poiccard/László Kovács (Jean-Paul Belmondo) shooting the policeman early in the film is edited in such a way that upon closer analysis it becomes clear that no such space exists in 'physical reality'. Yet the rapid-fire editing, borrowed from Sergei Eisenstein, works on an almost subliminal level: the audience, while bewildered, has no time to register the extent of the incoherence of action. The most extreme example is probably the scene in *Pierrot le fou*, where in the space of three seconds, Godard tells the story of an exchange of documents and money, before the gangsters are lured to the scene of their destruction.

Similar montage sequences recur with great regularity in Godard's films. In *Une femme est une femme*, the sequence where Angela (Anna Karina) and Alfred Lubitsch (Jean-Paul Belmondo) act out a minimalist musical, they claim, in the style of Cyd Charisse, Gene Kelly and Bob Fosse, Godard does not even attempt to disguise the rejection of continuity editing, as he cuts from one shot to the next with no indication of the characters' movement in between. The sequence can also be seen as a mockery of Kracauer's ideas on the general characteristics of film, particularly his argument on the key subjects of the 'recording functions' and 'revealing duties' of film: chase, dance and 'nascent motion' (Kracauer 1960: 41–45). This he does in the form of a contradiction in practice: while appearing to conform to Kracauer's prescriptions on the most suitable subjects for cinema by recording segments of dance, chase and concentrating on nascent motion as the series of frozen images is followed by a sudden burst of action when Alfred bounds into shot, Godard in fact undermines this by removing the crutches of a continuous space, pulling the whole edifice to the ground.

In *Le Mépris*, a film made under unusual conditions for Godard (commercial interests and the interference of producer Joseph E. Levine limited his freedom during production), he occasionally disrupts the structured flow of the narrative by inserting flashback and flash-forward sequences, and even a shot of Camille (Brigitte Bardot) running on a riverbank with no trace of a clue as to the geographical or temporal connection of the sequence to the narrative proper. This virtually extra-diegetic visual insert goes against the grain of Kracauer's view of 'proper editing', and denies the assertion that 'the assemblage … serves the purpose only if the film maker succeeds in suggesting a spatial continuum' (Kracauer 1960: 64). An example of a sequence that rejects all three prescriptions (coherence of

space, time and recording/revealing key subjects) is when Ferdinand and Marianne (Anna Karina) make their escape from the half-finished flat and set off to leave Paris in *Pierrot le fou*, perhaps Godard's most aggressive counter-argument against prescriptive and realist film theory. The sequence is edited with no regard to continuity of action: a long take of the two characters walking from the balcony to the lounge, then back to the balcony is followed by a series of brief images of their escape: first they are on the street, then back in the flat, then on the street once more, then on the roof, then in the car park, on the roof once more, they drop to the ground, they are in the car driving away, they are on the embankment, then once more in the car park, again on the embankment, and then they pull up at a petrol station outside the city; all within the space of twelve shots, and no more than a single minute of screen time. The complete disruption of unity of time and space is accompanied by a deconstruction of the chase narrative: Godard rejects the inherent linearity of the chase narrative, emphasizing the chaotic nature of escape, and countering Kracauer's views on its filmic values, and essential orderliness. He also puts paid to Bazin's poetic assertion that 'the cinema is objectivity in time … change mummified, as it were' (Bazin 1967a: 14).

In 'The virtues and limitations of montage', Bazin outlines his views on the use of montage, and on the supremacy of the unmanipulated recording of events, which he clearly favours over illusion created by editing. In his films, Godard seems intent on disproving Bazin's claims by repeatedly staging long sequences with little or no editing beyond cutting the film where necessary, yet showing little regard for the unity of space deemed so crucial by both Bazin and Kracauer. In *A bout de souffle*, when Michel enters the travel agency to pick up the money he is owed, Godard shows Michel from a low-angle loose close-up shot and dollies backwards throughout the scene as Michel goes first to the counter on the right, then to the one on the left, then walks to the back of the office accompanied by his friend, only to turn around, walk back to the waiting area and the left-hand counter, before exiting by one door as the policeman on his trail enters by the other. The tight framing of the subject in such a complicated travelling shot serves the purpose of disorientating the viewer, who ends up with little information on the space covered by the protagonist, and ironically counters Bazin's claim that a long take is necessarily of greater realism than a sequence of shots edited together in the cutting room. A similar effect occurs in the final scene of the film, where Godard follows in a long tracking shot the fatally wounded Michel (conforming to Kracauer's prescriptions on the use of the street as a location of inherent realism, as I shall discuss later; see Kracauer 1960: 71–74). He inter-cuts the forward-tracking shot of Michel running, clutching his back, towards the intersection, with the back-tracking close-up of Patricia (Jean Seberg) running, presumably (for Godard gives no information on her position within the space of action by not showing the two characters in the same shot) towards Michel. Godard does precisely the opposite of the rule set down by Bazin, dodging 'the difficulty of showing two simultaneous aspects of an action by simply using shot-and-reverse-shot' (Bazin 1967b: 48). That he does so arguably indicates Godard's awareness of Bazin's rule, and his disregard for such limitations on the scope of montage.

In *Pierrot le fou*, when Ferdinand and Marianne are shown in the half-finished flat, Godard goes further in his argument against Bazin's views on the long take. He uses long tracking and panning shots as Marianne is seen moving around the flat, making breakfast, looking at herself in the mirror and singing a song. Once more, the complexity of the camera and character movements prevent the audience from constructing a clear mental map of the apartment, but Godard clearly adds to the confusion, picking out different details in the flat as the camera sweeps through rooms already shown in earlier segments, showing little concern for what Bazin terms a 'straightforward photographic respect for the unity of space' (Bazin 1967b: 46). As Marianne enters the lounge for the second time, the camera dips down to reveal a corpse lying on the bed, as if appearing out of nowhere. The only fixed reference points are provided by the paintings and prints on the wall: the Modigliani portrait signals the lounge, the *Life* magazine cutting signals the fridge, and the Renoir print signals the bedroom. Having provided these key elements that offer the audience the illusion of a fixed mental map of the flat, Godard's camera roams into a new room when Franck (Georges Stacquet) turns up. Once more Godard frustrates the audience by drawing attention to the sleight of hand, revealing the illusory nature of the mental map of the flat. Perhaps the culmination of what Godard begins here is the famous tracking shot of the traffic jam in *Week-end* (Godard, 1967), where the same cars and characters recur within the one unbroken take of the same event, closing once and for all the argument on the essential greater realism of the long take over a montage sequence.

Kracauer repeatedly comes back to the term 'staginess' to discuss set design and theatrical acting in his *Theory of Film* (Kracauer 1960: 73–74). In a permissive gesture, Kracauer says 'the stagy, normally against the grain of the medium, assumes a positive aesthetic function if it is made to enhance the unstaged' (1960: 73). Godard's *Une femme est une femme* is, perhaps, a detailed argument against this view, aiming to show that staginess can be used in ways other than merely to enhance the realism of other sequences by contrast. Godard repeatedly resorts to the 'stagy' in order to represent events and actions, rather than show these in their 'physical reality'. Such a representation or enactment of an event is Angela's striptease number in the Zodiac club. Rather than offer a realistic striptease number, Godard shows the audience a mock-striptease, one that goes against the grain of not only the reality represented elsewhere in the film, but also of the very action represented. (A similar scene is the re-enactment of the Vietnam War by Marianne and Ferdinand in *Pierrot le fou*: Godard uses a crude pantomime to represent what cannot be shown in its physical reality: the horrors and senselessness of war.) Angela's performance is not erotic, or titillating, or exciting. Here the staginess serves not to enhance the realism of other sequences by contrast, but to draw attention to those qualities of the striptease that would remain invisible under a coating of titillation and voyeurism, were it to be shown in a way that could 'shock the shuddering and delighted onlooker into unseeing participation' (Kracauer 1960: 58). Here Godard also counters Bazin's argument that only a realistic representation relying on a 'fringe of trick work, that margin of subterfuge demanded by the logic of the story…

allows what is imaginary to include what is real and at the same time to substitute for it' (Bazin 1967b: 47).

In the first long sequence set in the flat shared by Angela and Emile (Jean-Claude Brialy), Godard once more uses the tool of staginess. Here too, in spite of the realistic set, Godard resorts to an acting style at odds with the purported realism of the film. As Angela and Emile begin their domestic argument, on what to have for dinner, whether to have a child and other issues of concern to the characters, Angela instructs Emile to take a bow before beginning what she calls their 'farce'. They then stop, turn to the camera and take a bow, at once acknowledging the presence of the audience in the cinema, and disrupting the narrative flow. They then return to their argument, but the disruption has served its purpose: the audience looks at the unfolding events in a new light. The gesture highlights the staginess of the sequence, and rather than acting as a foil against the scenes shot in the streets, it serves to alienate the audience, thereby drawing attention to the intellectual issues raised by the characters. Godard argues that stagy sequences can be used in the same way that Bazin argues the camera should be used, 'stripping its object of all those ways of seeing it, those piled up preconceptions, that spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes have covered it' (Bazin 1967a: 15).

Another aspect of staginess that Godard addresses, and which relates both to what Kracauer terms the 'virgin indeterminacy' of the image, and to the use of sound is the internal monologue, which Kracauer dismisses as 'sham counterpoint' in his analysis of *Hamlet* (Olivier, 1948) (Kracauer 1960: 119–20). A similar device to that employed by Olivier in the staging of Hamlet's soliloquies is used by Godard in *Le Mépris*. During the long scene in the flat where Camille and Paul discuss their relationship, Godard inserts a sequence of flashbacks and flash-forwards, as well as the already mentioned near-extradiegetic shot, which begins with Camille lying naked on a white shag pile carpet. She raises her head, looks at the camera and the audience hears her internal monologue. Godard invites the audience to ponder her words, while observing her naked figure. The internal monologue switches between Camille and Paul throughout the sequence, challenging Kracauer's rigid rules about 'commentative speech' and his assertion, based on Béla Balázs's argument, that 'the photographic images and the language images inevitably neutralize each other' if such a device is employed (Kracauer 1960: 119,106).

A slightly different scene, which I shall also discuss here because of its relevance to 'virgin indeterminacy' and the use of sound, is the scene where Angela and Alfred sit in the café in *Une femme est une femme* and listen to Charles Aznavour's scathing obituary of a love affair, 'Tu t'laisses aller' ('You're letting yourself go'). For most of the song Godard's camera remains fixed on Angela, occasionally straying to a close-up of Alfred. In a gesture reminiscent of Olivier's Hamlet soliloquies, Angela is shown reacting to the song, smiling a rueful smile, looking at herself in the mirror, lowering her eyelids in embarrassment as dictated by the song. Here Godard plays with the diegetic sound, turning it into 'commentative' sound and like Olivier, who 'conveys the impression that it is not so much Hamlet as his incorporeal soul which does the talking' (Kracauer 1960: 119), suggests that the song somehow originates in Angela's mind, and the

audience is privy to her thoughts. The combination of these effects disrupts the 'virgin indeterminacy' of the close-up of Angela's face: it is no longer the face of a woman captured on film and shown to the audience to consider its features, and ponder its mysteries. It has become the face of a woman somehow complicit in the decay of a love affair. Thus Godard projects the concepts he intends to convey onto the face of Angela, thereby removing from it that 'virgin indeterminacy', which for Kracauer is an essential element of the close-up.

In a chapter on the 'Flow of life', Kracauer discusses the significance of the street as a source of greater realism and thus a crucial element in cinema, suggesting that the street is 'a place where the flow of life is bound to assert itself' (Kracauer 1960: 72). Godard's films of the 1960s often feature scenes on the street, with the intriguing exception of *Le Mépris*, which features virtually no scenes on the street, bar those set in Cinecittà's 'cinema city'. These streets, bereft of life apart from the few characters in Godard's films, bring to mind the ghost towns of Hollywood westerns, and the notion of artificiality that they essentially convey. Much of *A bout de souffle* and *Une femme est une femme* takes place on the streets of Paris, while *Pierrot le fou* and *Week-end* are road movies of sorts. Godard uses the location of the street both to inject a documentary style into his filmmaking, and, it seems, to dispute Kracauer's statement: in Godard's films the street is often the place where life is interrupted in some way. In *A bout de souffle* Michel witnesses an accident there, and, at the end of the film, dies there. However, it is in *Une femme est une femme* that Godard addresses Kracauer's idea. In that film, in an attempt to grant Angela's wish of a child without having to do the deed himself, Emile stops passers-by and asks for help with the conception. Thus, as Kracauer writes, quoting Eisenstein, the 'characters … seem to have run straight from life onto the screen', but, crucially, the flow of life is interrupted as the actors stop 'real' people and address them, thereby wrenching them from their comforting quotidian existence into the realm of cinema (Kracauer 1960: 72). The process is thus reversed: it is not the intrusion of the street upon the film that brings increased realism, but the extrusion of the film into the realm of the real that halts the narrative and jolts the audience into the sudden realization of the inherent artificiality of film.

Kracauer identifies 'endlessness' as one of the essential qualities of film, arguing that in order to achieve the greatest degree of realism films must turn to the present, the actual environment in which they are produced (Kracauer 1960: 78). This actual environment, by virtue of being in the present, necessarily has the quality of endlessness, thus films must possess the same quality, Kracauer asserts. Later Kracauer argues that this means that films should not have a tragic ending, for they preclude the possibility of continuation, when in real life events are rarely finite: 'Contrary to tragic death, the happy ending makes you breathe the air of paradise and suggests at the same time that life will continue' (Kracauer 1960: 268). It is therefore interesting to note that all of Godard's films I have discussed end with the death of one or two of the main characters, with the exception of *Une femme est une femme*, which ends with a 'petite mort' or orgasm. That little death in effect concludes the film, and signals no true new beginning, as it solves the one meaningful conflict in Angela and Emile's

relationship. And while *A bout de souffle* may have been made before Kracauer's book was published, the ending is no less arbitrary: the conditions for Michel's escape are all given, but he murmurs 'J'en ai marre' ('I've had enough'), and chooses not to run. He thus makes the conscious choice not to live. This rejection of life can be interpreted as Godard's own rejection of physical reality in favour of artifice. Similarly, the ending of *Le Mépris* is an unexpected and arbitrary death: Camille and Prokosch (Jack Palance), on their drive back to Rome from Capri have an unlikely and fatal crash with a lorry. Once more, an alternative resolution is available to Godard: Camille and Prokosch drive off, and begin a new story. Yet Godard chooses to put a full stop at the end of the film, with the arbitrariness of the solution marking both the finiteness of the story, and the artificiality of film. In *Pierrot le fou*, while Marianne's death is possibly motivated by the narrative (Ferdinand, mad with rage that he cannot live with Marianne or without her, decides to shoot her), Ferdinand's is not. It is not even motivated by the character himself: as he lights the fuse he shouts 'Je suis idiot!' ('I'm an idiot!'). But it is too late, and the dynamite he has wrapped around his face explodes. Once more, the senselessness of the action, both in terms of character development and narrative structure highlights the arbitrariness and thus artificiality of the device.

Perhaps the most unequivocal indication that Godard sees his films as essays composed in response to realism theories, and specifically Bazin's writings on film, is the scene in *Pierrot le fou* when Ferdinand, dismayed by the party at Mr and Mrs Expresso's flat, says: 'I've got a machine to see with, called eyes. To hear with, I've got ears. To talk with, a mouth. But they feel like separate machines, there's no unity.' This is clearly a reference to Bazin's 'Ontology of the photographic image'. In that essay Bazin argues that the photographic process is essentially mechanical, and therefore 'the personality of the photographer enters into the proceedings only in his selection of the object' (Bazin 1967a: 13). Bazin asserts that it is the almost complete removal of human intervention that makes cinema what it is. 'Only the impassive lens … is able to present [the object] in all its virginal purity to my attention, and consequently to my love' (1967a: 15), he says, in an argument that Godard takes issue with in his films. For Godard, clearly, there is no such separation, either of the brain from the senses, or of the camera from the artist. In the scene in *Pierrot le fou* where the train rushes across the screen in what may be a mockery of *Umberto D* (de Sica, 1952), a film Kracauer holds in high esteem (Kracauer 1960: 98–99), Godard deliberately refuses to set up the camera Lumière-style, facing the onrushing train. Thus he takes the side of Méliès in the age-old debate between the realists and those who favour fantasy. A closer inspection of the character of Ferdinand further clarifies Godard's argument. Ferdinand, a character incapable of coordinating his senses, of relating his own environment to his emotions and of expressing basic ideas, instead spouting high concepts (while Marianne wants 'flowers, animals, blue skies', he needs 'ambition, hope, the motion of things'), is ultimately incapable of life. It is the passive and uncinematic Ferdinand who extinguishes the life of Marianne, the primary catalyst of action, and finally kills the film itself. The divided character, as the mechanical camera, is incapable of life without the guidance of the artist. In the scene where the gangsters are lured to their

deaths, it is Marianne, looking through the apparatus of the telescopic sight of her high-powered rifle, who pulls the trigger. This can be seen as a metaphor for the film-making process. It is the act of looking through the lens, and then pulling the trigger (or shooting the film) that counts, not the mechanical process of the firing pin hitting the bullet. Throughout the film it is Godard the film-maker who determines the image that the audience perceives; the arbitrary shifts in colour, the intricately executed camera movements, the juxtaposition of images in the cutting room are the determining factor, not the inanimate and mechanical camera.

As I have discussed, Godard picks specific statements from Kracauer and Bazin's writings, and sets about to disprove them in his films of the 1960s. *A bout de souffle* is his first attack against Bazin, dealing mostly with his ideas on the limitations of montage, showing that the longer take, contrary to what Bazin claims, does not necessarily lead to greater realism. In *Une femme est une femme* Godard begins a three-way dialogue, addressing Kracauer's theories on film, and trying to disprove the two theorists' ideas on the use of sound, location and staginess. *Le Mépris*, a more subtle film because of the constraints on Godard's directorial independence, addresses the idea of contrapuntal sound, goes against Kracauer's ideas on the need for a happy ending, and challenges concepts of the essential linearity of narrative. Finally *Pierrot le fou*, implicitly ridiculing Bazin and Kracauer's ideas, is a catalogue of all these. It shows that the long take can be as abstract as a montage sequence, that realistic locations do not necessarily enhance the realism of a film, that the suggestion that film is the result of a purely mechanical process is absurd, and that a spatial continuum is not essential to the filmic representation of events. *Week-end* is no longer concerned with Bazin and Kracauer, suggesting that as far as Godard is concerned, *Pierrot le fou* concludes the argument. Kracauer posits:

> Imagine a film which, in keeping with the basic properties, records interesting aspects of physical reality but does so in a technically imperfect manner… Nevertheless such a film is more specifically a film than one which utilises brilliantly all the cinematic devices and tricks to produce a statement disregarding camera reality.
>
> (1960: 36)

Bazin, speaking on *Le Ballon rouge* (Lamorisse, 1952), suggests that 'this story owes everything to the cinema, precisely because, essentially, it owes nothing to it' (Bazin 1967b: 46). Godard's answer to both is a resounding 'I don't think so!'

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How does the digital matter? Envisioning corporeality through Christian Volckman's *Renaissance*

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Abstract

Existential phenomenology addresses the idea of vision as an embodied and meaningful activity. Within this schema, perception is already informed by the sensory intentionality of the living being that is setting itself within a dialectical and dialogical relation to the world. In such an understanding of experience, cinematic vision is positioned within the individual and historical person who interacts with a screen that itself reflects an existential relation between body and world. But what happens when digital images present entities and spaces that are physically not part of this world? How, in other words, do computational structures affect cinema's relation with reality? This article examines arguments concerned with the relation between digital media and corporeality, filtering them through the work of André Bazin, Roland Barthes, and Gilles Deleuze. From the point of view exhibited by Christian Volckman's Renaissance *(2006), it questions the idea that digital cinema is a one-way ticket to incorporeality, suggesting that the new technology does in fact retain the ability to matter through nuances specific to its own constructions.*

Keywords

Christian Volckman
digital cinema
corporeality
indexicality
notations
geste

The transition from photochemical transcription to computational codification makes issues relating to historical and physical reality pertinent to a discussion of cinematic technology. How does the cinematic image gain a sense of corporeality when it is cut off from the real world, not simply due to some subjective alteration of its authenticity, but as a procedural element of its very creation?

At a first glance, this question invites one to think of the image's nature as a consequence of the apparatus and its function. Photographic film does not simply depict reality, but carries it in its photochemical cells. Digital bytes, on the other hand, convert the real into a form that is physically dissimilar and analogically irreconcilable, thus eliminating it from the image created. This differentiation is the result of the index that physically links the real and its representation in the photographic, and the absence of this bond in the digital. It is an assumption that seems to hold up as it meticulously follows the image's generation on the basis of the producing device. On the one hand, a photographic apparatus is a medium through which light from the world is transferred to its image through reflection, and so the image is a *real* image. But a digital apparatus is a tool that transmutes the light of the world into numerical strings that bear a

logical relation to the world instead of a physical one; and therefore the image is an *image* of the real world.

Nevertheless, there is an imperative element within my opening question that causes a disruption of the equation between light and matter by including a constituent of reality that is unstable. I am speaking here of the viewer of the image from whose perspective one can initially speak of a reality. If there is no subject by whom the real quality of the image can be examined, then the quest of the real in the image loses all substance.

Consider Man Ray's short film *Le Retour à la raison/Return to Reason* (Ray, 1923) that connects abstract patterns and shapes, nails, objects, shots from a merry-go-round, and a woman's torso, to create an assemblage of images. To describe these depictions plainly as images results in a crucial omission, because what is visible is directly that which the film had been subjected to at the time of its creation: nails, a woman. As those elements existed then, they are seen now. The woman was there in exactly the same form that she is seen in eighty years later. They were real existences that left their physical trace on the filmstrip.

But there is something more to this reality, something that draws me closer to the representation and that refers not simply to the physical reality of the image, but to the very encounter of this viewing. This is the presence of my vision, an essential feature of the present encounter that is imbued with the space and time that surrounds it. Simply put, when I see that woman, I do not directly see her as she was; I see her as she is. I look at her to possess her in all her beauty, but I know that I can never seize her, for all she is now is a play of light on my imagination. What is mine is my imagination; but she is never simply here for me. I know two things from our encounter: I know that she existed and I know that I can never be an intimate part of that existence, but only a subject who embeds her in, and as, my present.

This to-and-fro of photography's indexical structure is an interesting case, specifically when one tries to pinpoint a shift in cinema from the standpoint of current technological development. In this article, I will attempt to trace the effect of cinema specifically with regard to bodily representations and their materiality. The consequence that I am speaking of is grounded in the relation the image has with the world it represents and the viewer who is seen as both part of that world and the seeing agent of its representation. This is the body for which the digital does matter.

The foundation for my quest to acknowledge that we are in fact confronted by or making our way into something new for cinema, is that which is at the immediate disposal of my scrutiny: the technology itself. I align myself with Vivian Sobchack who maintains that technology is never just a separate part of a society independently existing in itself, but an important element of the way a society realizes its presence and lives its relation with the world. In other words, technology is thought of as a dynamic element of the correlative structures of society, which stimulates our being-in-the-world, constituting, as Sobchack explains, 'differing modes of presentation and representation to different aesthetic responses and ethical responsibilities' (2004: 136). To reflect on technology is ultimately to go beyond the steel and plastic of the object and to look at the sort of

thinking that led to its creation, and most importantly the kind of thinking that it itself promotes as a technology.

From this perspective, one can recognize a movement from a light-based, indexical and analogical medium, to a code-based, non-indexical and digital medium. The important difference between the two forms is how they treat the physical world in the creation of their images. In *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich (2001) distinguishes numerical representation as the most crucial nuance introduced by the digital, as it eliminates the analogical continuity that had been preserved by other recording mechanisms. Indeed, both technologies use the light reflected off the world in their processes, but where analogue representations are direct and isomorphic transcriptions, digital representations are conversions of these patterns of light and shade into abstract numbers that are assigned formal relationships on the basis of a preformatted numerical grid. As a consequence, the image's internal continuum is disrupted by becoming a set of separate, discrete, self-contained units (pixels) that can be described using a mathematical function; and the image is subjected to an overtly accessible manipulation of each separate component by applying appropriate algorithms.

Manovich draws attention to the fact that both photography and analogue film also have a form of discreteness: in the first case, the minuscule grains of silver halides that become evident when we blow up the image, and in the second the further temporal slicing up of movement into still images that form the 24-frames-a-second illusion of continuity. But in actuality, the continuity–discontinuity dichotomy is somewhat more complex in the case of photographic media, as the grains are inseparable, glued together, as it were, in their condition as the physical trace of the event-object-subject recorded. Moreover, as time is recorded and made visible through the successive flow of stills, the rhythmic motion of the apparatus can be seen to be the bearer of the natural continuity of the actual event.

The specific relation between continuity and discontinuity changes with digital technology that favours absolute discreteness. Once an image is digitized, it becomes numerical no matter what its original state was. Therefore, for a computer, the only difference between a digital photograph of a landscape and a computer-generated landscape rests in the numbers. In effect, they are both just a set of numbers and really nothing more and nothing less. The indexical quality of the photographic is eradicated by computer genetics that create the potential for representing non-existent, entirely fabricated images. Here is where one can posit the inherent absence of a concrete materiality in digital media.

The fragmentary nature of the digital can be further illustrated in the modular structure of a digital object. As Manovich explains: 'Media elements … are represented as collections of discrete samples (pixels, polygons, voxels, characters, scripts), [which] are assembled into larger-scale objects but continue to maintain their separate identities' (2001: 30). This characteristic is what makes digital objects so easy to alter at any moment, as everything remains independent and open to modification without the need to adjust the whole at the same time. The whole here is a compact set of elements that are in fact not interdependent, but intradependent,

Figure 1: Renaissance

Figure 2: Renaissance

expressing, in other words, their own configuration at any one instant, without the necessity of adhering to the logic of the other parts of the image. Thus, as digital constructions are constituted by isolated elements all the way down to the level of the text character, cinema's relation to the world as a highly complex array of intra- and interdependent relations is displaced.

Figure 3: Renaissance

Figure 4: Renaissance

The French digital animation *Renaissance* (Volckman, 2006, see figures 1–4) tries to address the problem of digital immateriality by reconnecting the configuration of the image to actual bodies. The plot itself deals with the ethics of the body, and scientific and technological control over life; set in Paris in the year 2054, it depicts the corrupt practices of a pharmaceutical company called Avalon as it tries to achieve the ultimate product of all

Figure 5: Renaissance

Figure 6: Renaissance

time: beauty and immortality. Indeed, Christian Volckman and Onyx Films marketed the movie to draw attention to its fascinating imagery where it combines live-action motion capture, animated in 3D and rendered in high contrast black and white to create a graphic novel, film-noir looks, see figures 5–8. But the idea of motion capture came primarily from the

Figure 7: Renaissance

Figure 8: Renaissance

director's desire to create characters that were not flat graphic images, but believably realistic personalities that would arouse affection in the audience.

Undeniably, the movie does succeed in creating quite realistically animated characters, although not fully natural, precisely because of the way that motion capture works. In short, the method creates the movement and behaviour of the digital characters by digitizing the movement of a number of marks positioned on real actors. This suggests that *Renaissance* attempts to bring a sense of materiality within its images by encoding a causal link between them and reality: characters gain a bodily substance on the basis of motion, a motion that is natural because it follows the lines of nature. However, I would argue that the impact the characters make on the audience is not strong enough to override their graphic quality. Instead, they seem too light, too fluid, too clean,

too weightless: in other words, bodiless. The reason for this lack points back to the particular discontinuity that is characteristic of the technology; that is, the fact that the motion is encoded into the software system on the basis of a limited number of marks, as if the human body could be narrowed down to a few separate points.

But as Laura Marks emphasizes, it might be more useful to examine digital materiality through qualities immanent to the medium itself. In her book *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* she maintains that it would be erroneous to pay attention to the image's origin at all, because such a quest loses all significance in a fundamentally manipulable medium. As such, Marks proposes to think of the image in terms of the particular decision on the part of its creator to actualize it in the way that s/he did (Marks 2002: 149). In essence, this idea entails removing the notion of indexicality from the broad-spectrum setting of the physical world, and reconfiguring it to fit inside the digital world on the basis of a causal link between creator and her/his image. The image regains a corporeality, but it is no longer indexical in the classical sense; it is more indicative of a flexibility rendered in some form through the actions of a creator.

How viable would it be, though, to think of the digital image as having an individual creator? Taking into consideration the large group of people that take part in the creation of even the simplest of digital images (from the programmers to the designers), to think of the creator as a single person is evidently reductive. When making the image, one would have to use a database already designed by someone else, thus relying to a great extent on a set of rules and capabilities external to one's own creativity. Moreover, once the image is distributed, it just furthers its manipulability for a wide range of users.

Nevertheless, Marks insists on the idea of digital materiality by focusing further on the technology's own mortality (2002: 157). Just like analogue film and video, digital images are subject to demise because of the obsoleteness of different hardware and software formats caused by technological advancements and market strategies. Moreover, similar to celluloid's vinegar syndrome or video's demagnetization, the digital suffers from a form of decay due to 'bit-rot' – that is, information loss through the compression and transfer of images from one system to another – or even through internal problems of the system that cause operational defects. What is more, the creator her/himself can purposefully fabricate these errors by embedding faulty algorithms into the configurational processes (the equivalent of scratching, for instance, a strip of film). Marks does present a strong case here, but I think that the underlying ambition on which the digital industry is revolving leads to an immediate disregard for actual presence in favour of an always-fashionable future that promises a distant yet visible world. Nevertheless, even this future temporality remains a utopia, as it constantly outlines a new target for consumers, leaving them with a constant lack of desire for present objects in the hope of the ever-promising new. Death, in other words, is just a trivial occurrence like any other, because a very anticipated replacement is on its way.[1]

Indeed, the notion of time is rightfully of utmost importance in various explorations of the subject precisely because of the non-indexicality of the technology. In an essay entitled 'Afterward: a matter of time' (2003),

1. Note the current emergence of High Definition and Blu-ray technologies just a decade after the introduction of the first DVD systems.

experimental film-maker and photographer Babette Mangolte focuses on her hands-on experience regarding the two technologies to stress the effect the digital's supposed immateriality has on both creator and spectator. As she explains, weight, length and duration all exist as prominent elements of the encounter between the subject as film-maker and the object as film, to the point where the subject–object schema is reversible due to the existential empowerment of the film. Like real bodies/subjects, photographic film too combines an interrelated system of qualities that define its relation with the world, and on the basis of which it comes in touch with other entities/bodies. Just as a cut on a finger is immediately felt and will need time to heal, so is the cut of the film experienced in the body as desire, anticipation, expectation and anxiety because it physically takes place. On the other hand, digital editing leaves one with no sense of direct touch, no physical impression of duration, no anxiety about a twitch of the hand or anticipation for the outcome. Everything is done at a distance, against the coldness of the plastic mouse and keyboard, and with no feeling for consequences, as anything can be undone with the ease of a click.

With regard to projection formats, there is a sense of materiality present in film technologies that seems missing from the digital equivalent. As the shutter opens and closes between each frame as well as once during that frame, duration is rendered as physical motion, a visual vibration that resonates with the patterns of a heart beating. This is not necessarily noticeable by the spectator, but time is nonetheless present. Quite differently, digital projection does away with the shutter by producing a continuous beam of light that remains, in effect, motionless. There is no flicker, and no heartbeat; no need for the persistence of vision to reproduce movement using interrupted instants of images.

In addition, due to the rapid succession of film frames, the grain of the photographic creates a constantly shifting texture, as if the image was covered by morning dew that has a life of its own, unsettled and untraceable, a constant reminder of the progression of time as indeterminable change, as entropy. Instead, the digital image is a grid of pixel-size slots that remains fixed, losing its sensorial pleasure as it becomes a mere icon, a graphic element. Of course, digital programming has created a substitute for this texture by adding a grain effect to digital images so they can look more photo-realistic. But such an act cannot replace the erratic quality of change – of life in motion – that film grain expresses. Entropy does not exist in the encoded bit-map of the numerical. On the contrary, change in the digital is limited to the renewal of the set of algorithms that are directly related to only that which is renewed in the image.

In other words, the pulse of the succession of images and the entropy of its textuality bring a sense of vitality to the filmic that echoes the tension of living. What is missing from the digital is the pathos of life with its extremities and unpredictabilities, with its sensations and emotions. By erasing these elements, the digital image seems to convey only the plasticity of its essence, in the sense of it remaining inorganic, flexible without consequence, and a simple surface of effects.

The digital's quite unique inconsequential flexibility is emphasized (perhaps?) in one of its simultaneously fascinating and absurd new images: the morph – the digital body's ability, in other words, to change

uninterruptedly from one form to another. Sobchack examines this extensively in *Carnal Thoughts* where she compares digital morphing to plastic surgery on the basis of how both operations make tremendous efforts to create a beautiful and seamless image, while never disclosing the effort, cost, and pain involved for the bodies that take part in the procedure as labourers or patients (2004: 36-52). In a sense, the characters in *Renaissance* are morphs, because they too are signifiers of the transformation from an existence to a graphic image – real bodies reduced to extraordinary black and white surfaces. Indeed, even though the actors form the basis for the creation of the characters, they seem completely absent from the movie. Their cinematic counterfeits are mesmerizing creatures, plastic entities whose physical weight (their relation to space) and signs of age (their relation to time) are erased. All that remains is the image of sharp lines and smooth exteriors fluidly moving along the screen. The actual body has been substituted by an ageless surface that, like plastic surgery, conceals the time and effort necessary for its creation (in this case, the six years and the struggles that it took the film-makers to make *Renaissance*).

Sobchack is quite right to point out how both medical and digital surgery are keen advocates of a notion of the Ideal. Chance occurrences, and incalculable change filled with a dynamic potential for life are placed under threat in the digital image that is devised to offer complete control, so that death is not defeated or forgotten, but made completely redundant. The body's relation to time as the duration of its past experiences, its present existence and its force towards a future becoming, are eliminated under the shallowness of the fixed image that is the index of its own power for control. All in all, what is consequently manifested is an image of an immaterial being that is effortless and easy, that evades pain and death, and that is magically timeless.

Then again, there may still be scope for making a connection between the digital and the physical world. Manovich discusses an unprecedented connection to the physical on the basis of the digital's potential for immediate interaction that the Human Computer Interface creates. But it is imperative to look closely at this aspect to decipher what kind of interaction this is, examining whether it is correct to term this relation interactive at all. Indeed, for the DVD edition of *Renaissance* this interactivity is limited to playing-stopping-pausing, jumping forwards and backwards in the story, accessing specific chapters, adding and removing subtitles, and watching extra features. Obviously, these options – with the exception of the first – would be impossible not only in film, but in analogue video as well. But the question remains as to what this really means for digital cinema.

I take interactivity to be a form of dialectics, meaning that it characterizes a relation that is a dynamically organic intradependent and interdependent tension of creative contact, born from both parties immersing themselves introspectively and reflectively in the event. Simply making a selection out of a list of choices does not make the experience encapsulating, and certainly does not make me aware of my body, conscious of my position in the world. The Human Computer Interface that Manovich speaks of is part of a tool, and as such it does not react to anything; it simply functions. This is to say that the interactive potential of the computer is nothing more than the ability of the user to control it directly, the computer

simply functioning on the basis of the instructions of both its internal software and the actions of the user.

So what about spectatorship as an instance of interactivity itself? Sobchack's work on existential phenomenology extensively addresses the idea of vision as an embodied and meaningful existential activity (Sobchack 2004). What is most interesting with this project is that it conceives of a relation between the spectator, the film, the film-maker and the world as intra- and interrelated, both reflexive and reflective, at the same time subjective and objective. The spectator is relocated in the body that is her/his existence, from where s/he sees the cinematic image that is itself an act of seeing the world. In other words, Sobchack outlines a theory that bases itself on a link between body and world in a relation that packs the two elements tightly into one, without losing the sense of individuality and separateness of both elements.

It is important to note that perception in this schema is not a pure means of experiencing the world through the body as if we were cut off from mind and culture. It is, on the contrary, already informed by the sensible intentionality of the living being that is setting itself within a dialectical and dialogical relation to the world, even when conscious thought has not yet taken place. In such an understanding of the experience, cinematic vision is positioned within the individual and historical person whose cinematic experience takes place through the body, which interacts with a screen that itself reflects an existential relation between body and world. But if the body's experience of the world is already informed by knowledge and culture, how can one possibly relate physically to things that are just not there. For instance, can one ever start to imagine what the world of *Renaissance* feels, sounds, or smells like? One could certainly make an analogy with something that actually exists, most probably with today's Paris and living people. But this will always displace one's senses, so that one experiences the image like a simile, which implies an always indirect definition *via* an Other on the basis of some similarity (experiencing things *like* something else and not as itself). In fact, it seems that the digital is targeted most overtly at the eye, and only the eye.

All the same, the question of the corporeality of digital images remains unanswered. Both André Bazin (1967) and Roland Barthes (2000) based their theorization of photographic reality on the indexical function of the camera. But if the digital is not of the same representational nature as the photographic, and is instead a non-analogical, non-indexical, numerical transcription in some form or other, does this mean that it is incapable of rendering the real altogether? To argue this would essentially mean evaluating the digital on the basis of what it is not doing, bracketing it within a negation and not opening it up to see what its constructions can achieve. In fact, dealing with it on the basis of indexicality is part of the problem, because it is not an indexical system. On the contrary, as it is a numerically based coding and decoding, it is possible to examine it from the point of view of a symbolic system like language.

In Barthes's 'The Reality Effect' (1982), which he wrote with an eye towards realism in literature, the French theorist speaks of certain descriptive details of narrative (what he calls 'notations'), which do not fit into its main articulations and stand out as superfluous and functionless.

As an example, he uses a short excerpt from Gustave Flaubert's *Un cœur simple* (1893) and another from Jules Michelet's *Histoire de France* (1967), in which references to a barometer in the former, and to the duration of a sitting for Charlotte Corday's painting and the size and location of a door in her prison in the latter, do not play any role besides adding clearly descriptive information. He writes that 'these details are scandalous (from the point of view of structure), or, even more disturbingly, they seem to be allied with a kind of narrative *luxury*, profligate to the extent of throwing up "useless" details and increasing the cost of narrative information' (Barthes 1982: 11; Barthes's emphasis). They evade the purposes of the narrative by not conforming to any clear objective, by not taking part in the predictive structures of the system. Based on these insignificant references, Barthes asks whether there are elements in structures that are not meaningful; and if there are, how this insignificance could be understood.

In posing these questions, he proposes that these descriptive residues of narrative determinism do signify something: concrete reality. As he explains, these seemingly superfluous elements partake in the creation of the events by situating them in a certain milieu of reality. They do not need to abide by any laws of narrative development because they refer to things that were simply there in reality, which is reason enough for their appearance. Barthes explains that

> all this demonstrates that the "real" is assumed not to need any independent justification, that it is powerful enough to negate any notion of "function", that it can be expressed without there being any need for it to be integrated into a structure, and that the *having-been-there* of things is a sufficient reason for speaking of them.
>
> (Barthes 1982: 15; Barthes's emphasis)

The irrelevance that these lingual instances conjure up, brings about an impression of the real because it acts upon, or against, the imagination's preparedness for reason and cause. If these 'notations' do not adhere to the development of the narrative, then they are simply there and do not need any further reasoning. As such, they are constituted through the exclusion of the signified from the sign and the collusion of the referent and a signifier. By this, Barthes is simply trying to hinder the simple development of the narrative into meaningful ideas, and to allow for a feeling of the real to find its way into the representational construction. The unnecessary detail is justified through this direct relation to its referent.

Nevertheless – and this is what is most interesting in his analysis – this realism is a 'referential illusion' whereby the real is actually not directly denoted, but connoted. By escaping the site of the signified as signs that belong to, and that represent, the narrative, these disturbances become *signs* of reality; that is, instead of denoting reality directly, they are signifying it. As Barthes explains:

> Flaubert's barometer, Michelet's little door, say, in the last analysis, only this: *we are the real*. It is the category of the "real", and not its various contents,

> which is being signified; in other words, the very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the referent, standing alone, becomes the true signifier of realism.
>
> (Barthes 1982: 16; Barthes's emphasis)

Reality, in this sense, is *represented* as that which is just there without any need for a specific logic.

To return to *Renaissance*, one could argue that its reality effect, its link to a materiality, is not achieved on the basis of either the motion capture, or Volckman's creative input, or the ability to jump to any point in the progression of the story. Instead, it is achieved on what is superfluous to the narrative, unnecessary information for the achievement of the characters' goals and the resolution of the story: the extra features on the DVD where the viewer can access events that are related, but not confined to the narrative in any way. There, s/he can see the real actors all wired up as they rehearse in an empty blue studio, where their faces reflect the duration and the strain of the procedure, and where the space carries and resists the weight of their bodies. Motion capture is in fact depicted as a procedural element, but both its end product and the plot are put on hold. It is in these menus that the limit of the visual field is opened up so that procedures of viewing and creating in this very world are brought to the fore.

In *The Time-Image* (1989), Gilles Deleuze speaks of 'gestes' as elements that are irrelevant to the narrative construction of the cinematic depiction. The 'geste', he explains, 'is the development of attitudes themselves, and, as such, carries out a direct theatricalization of bodies, often very discreet, because it takes place independently of any role' (Deleuze 1989: 192). Here, the body is understood as an element of living – that is, life as process, and not stasis – because it is caught up in the interval between everydayness and performance. Neither here nor there, the geste suggests a category of transgressing boundaries so that corporeality is the very procedure of a body becoming a role – or a digital image – without yet losing the rudimentary elements of physicality that connect that body with a certain space and time as that within which s/he exists. It is here that the spectator gains access to a glimpse of a body as a living entity, despite any digital make-up, transformation, or extreme disregard for natural laws. And so, however much Robert Dauney (the actor) is eliminated from the representation of Barthelemy Karas (the leading role), he is found in the images of the *Making of Renaissance*, the place where real bodies are situated in space and time, and from where the effect of the digital becomes part of the world of the viewer, as much as that of its own technology.

Returning to my opening question, it becomes apparent that digital cinema's corporeality seems impossible to define when one persistently remains within the confines established by photographic media and indexicality's distinctive relation to reality. Both the refraction of photographic indexicality through a digital perspective, and the obsessive evaluation of the digital on photographic premises, leaves an approach to the new technology lingering between a nostalgia for what was, and an inability to think of what could be. Instead, by looking at the potential of its own symbolic system, one can imagine different sets of relations whereby materiality is revealed as part of the image in quite different ways. Through the

connotational effects of digital 'notations' (the extra features), the digital regains access to the real that it encodes; and in the changing forces of the 'geste' (the body as interval), the spectator is brought in touch with her/his own body as organic procedure. In other words, by piercing its own deterministic mathematical regime with unnecessary elements, the digital creates an image of superfluousness as a sign of what matters as that which simply is. And mapped onto both its own and the actors' bodies in the process of becoming, it reveals what it means to exist as activity, as a force of constant change. Herein lies the corporeality of digital technology.

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The road as the (non-)place of masculinity: *L'Emploi du temps*

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Abstract

Laurent Cantet's L'Emploi du temps *(2001) figures the nominally transitional spaces of cinema – the road, the motor car, the service station – as central to its narrative and its protagonist's response to crisis. Reflecting and developing Marc Augé's concept of the* non-lieu, *the road and the car in Cantet's film become sites where the male subject simultaneously evades and performs the tasks of familial responsibility. The film can therefore be seen as a critique of the world of work as one constructed on illusory foundations; one which examines the disguised reiteration of masculine codes within the practice of commuting and the objects of everyday working life, and as such, suggests masculine crisis as deferred or repressed rather than resolved. Ultimately, then, the film can be read as one which engages critically with the use of cultural and narrative systems as sustaining, in concealed ways, dominant orders.*

Keywords

Cantet
Augé
Romand
non-lieu/non-place
masculinity
road movie

This essay will consider the motifs of the road and the motor car in *L'Emploi du temps/Time Out* (Cantet, 2001), emphasizing their role as a site for constructing masculinity. Much of Laurent Cantet's film, and the entirety of its opening sequence, features the protagonist, Vincent, either in his car or at the numerous service stations and lay-bys en route. As such, the car on the road as a place of insularity becomes a defining feature of a film marked by the tensions between fathers and sons, husbands and wives, between the weight of responsibility and the fantasies of lightness. The film's specific emphasis on the car as object and on the road as the location of narrative, rather than merely an intermediate, transitional space, means that I will focus on these motifs not as metaphor, but rather as the actual manifestation of a particular tension explored by the film.

I will therefore, to an extent, draw upon recent studies of the 'road film'. In particular, I will draw on the idea of the journey as exploring the tension between 'individual impulse and social organisation' (Laderman 2002: 35). I will nevertheless suggest that whatever dialogue is undertaken with the road form, that dialogue interrogates the latter's generic tropes, reconfiguring its notions of space, freedom and flight. As such, I situate the film within a strain that runs alongside, and to a degree overlaps with, the 'new realism' to which Will Higbee relates Cantet's work (Higbee 2004); this includes films such as *Western* (Poirier, 1997), *Harry un ami qui vous veut du bien/Harry, He's Here to Help* (Moll, 2000), *Feux rouges/Red Lights* (Kahn, 2004), and more explicitly, *Extension du domaine de la lutte/Whatever* (Harel, 1999) and *Le Huitième jour/The Eighth Day* (Van Dormael, 1996). I argue

that these very different films, while evidently not all road films, share a particular tendency. Although they use to varying degrees the motifs of the road – movement and transition, desire, envy and escape – they all consider the (re)configuring of masculine identity, of one's *place*, within the demands and constraints of contemporary capitalist society. If Vincent's personal trajectory does not resemble that of the typical road movie protagonist, it is nevertheless notable that, from the basis of the story's starting point – *l'affaire* Romand – Cantet and his co-writer Robin Campillo have crafted a film based as much on the personal space of the road journey as its central character's actions. The road, then, is not merely an arbitrary conduit for the various conflicts depicted. Here, it is that which carries one away from the social space; it is a form of in-between site which challenges borders and limits, both spatial and imaginary. To overlook the centrality of the road itself as a determining factor in these processes is therefore to underestimate the qualities of the road journey as sensation and experience.

The notion of the *non-lieu* as described by Marc Augé (1995) is central to my argument. The relation between this feature of Augé's work and Cantet's film has already been pointed out briefly by Ginette Vincendeau (Vincendeau 2002: 30), and subsequently, in somewhat more depth, by Higbee (Higbee 2004: 246). This essay will seek to develop and elucidate further these comments. The significance of Augé's term is that it is specific to the particular socio-economic milieu and anxieties depicted within *L'Emploi du temps*; moreover, it proposes a conception of subjectivity similar to that offered by the film itself. The concept's ambivalence is reflected in the film's oscillation between freedom and the undertow of constraint, inasmuch as Vincent's journeys provide the appearance of escape, whilst simultaneously acting as a cover for, and leading him back to, his paternal responsibility at the family home. Following Michel de Certeau's distinction between *lieu* and *espace* (de Certeau 1990: 172–75), the *non-lieu* is perhaps a more appropriately double-edged development of de Certeau's challenge to the Foucauldian regime of disciplined bodies. What is perhaps optimistically overlooked by de Certeau is that the pressures exerted by discipline, even if unconsciously absorbed, are repressed, and therefore symptomatically represented in equal measure (Buchanan 2000: 100). The *non-lieu* of the car and the motorway serves then, I would argue, as both the manifestation of, and resistance to such repression.

While the title of this essay suggests a similar response to that already provided by Higbee (Higbee 2004: 245–47), there is a crucial distinction in my argument. Whereas Higbee focuses on the element of social-realist melodrama in Cantet's work, seeing the non-place as a temporary site for the negotiation of crisis (a heterotopia), I read its predominance within *L'Emploi du temps* as signifying a less dualistic schema. The non-place is not just an escape route for the masculine in crisis, but a site in which masculine identity within patriarchy is imaginarily restored and reassured; or in other words, I argue that the tensions Higbee aptly describes find their imaginary resolution, rather than evasion, within the non-place's gendered zone. The fact that the (non-)places within which the film's protagonist operates are mobile, solitary or male-dominated, reiterates how gender has been considered central to the cinematic road. Critics have often

tended to focus on this aspect of the genre in negative terms. Molly Haskell consequently conflates the road with the 'buddy' movie, indicating their process of disavowal (Haskell 1987: 361–2): the 'self-discovery' (Hayward 2000: 313) of the road movie's (male) protagonist is therefore merely the denial of difference; the protagonists' knowledge of themselves (as 'men') is exerted through a rejection of the feminine which legitimates the homosocial bond, while denying its slide towards a homo*sexual* bond (Sedgwick 1985: 19).

Stuart Aitken and Christopher Lukinbeal identify the crisis of masculinity within the road film in terms of 'the [necessary] imbalance between internal and external space … a juxtaposition between place-based sedentarism and disengaged mobility' (Aitken & Lukinbeal 1997: 351). The question here concerns the stakes in male subjectivity, and the relationship of place to those stakes. Aitken and Lukinbeal make the subsequent point that mere geographic flight from place-based identity and its 'home-based masculinity' (1997: 351) simply reiterates the norm: 'The problem of the road movie genre [is] the *apparent* free mobility of its subject. The danger is that spatial metaphors of mobility combine to form an incontestable meta-narrative which … may be simply another form of hegemonic masculinity' (1997: 352; Aitken and Lukinbeal's emphasis).

The role of the non-place

If there is any journey of self-discovery in *L'Emploi du temps*, it is one that culminates at the original point of departure (the family) rather than one of disavowal: Vincent's route is one of mainly aimless circuits, in place, apparently, of the frontiersman's accumulative trajectory. The film's ambiguity in terms of space extends to its generic categories. The road for Vincent figures simultaneously as a site of both evasion *and* production, just as his journey is one of both denial and acceptance. Cantet himself articulates this point when he argues that Vincent

> opts for an untenable position, split halfway between the reassuring recognition of bourgeois society he can't do without (family, job, money), and an altogether darker universe (idleness, fraud, trafficking). He thinks he can create a point of stability between these two opposing poles, which in the end proves impossible.
>
> (Cantet 2001)

Just as Vincent explains later in the film that the pleasure in his former job was the drives *between* places, the film illustrates how his transitional movement is intrinsic to a form of productivity: firstly, in that his double life requires his continued absence to justify itself; and secondly, inasmuch as his itinerary is not a deviation from the trajectory of working lives, but an imitation of it, with its banality and repetition. The film's masterful sustaining of tension proceeds from this very absence of dramatic pacing: the drama, I would argue, is not so much manifest within the protagonist (Aurélien Recoing's Vincent provides only the subtlest hints of emotional modulation), as in the discrepancy between spectator knowledge and the protagonist's apparent failure to escape the reassuring bubble of the non-place.

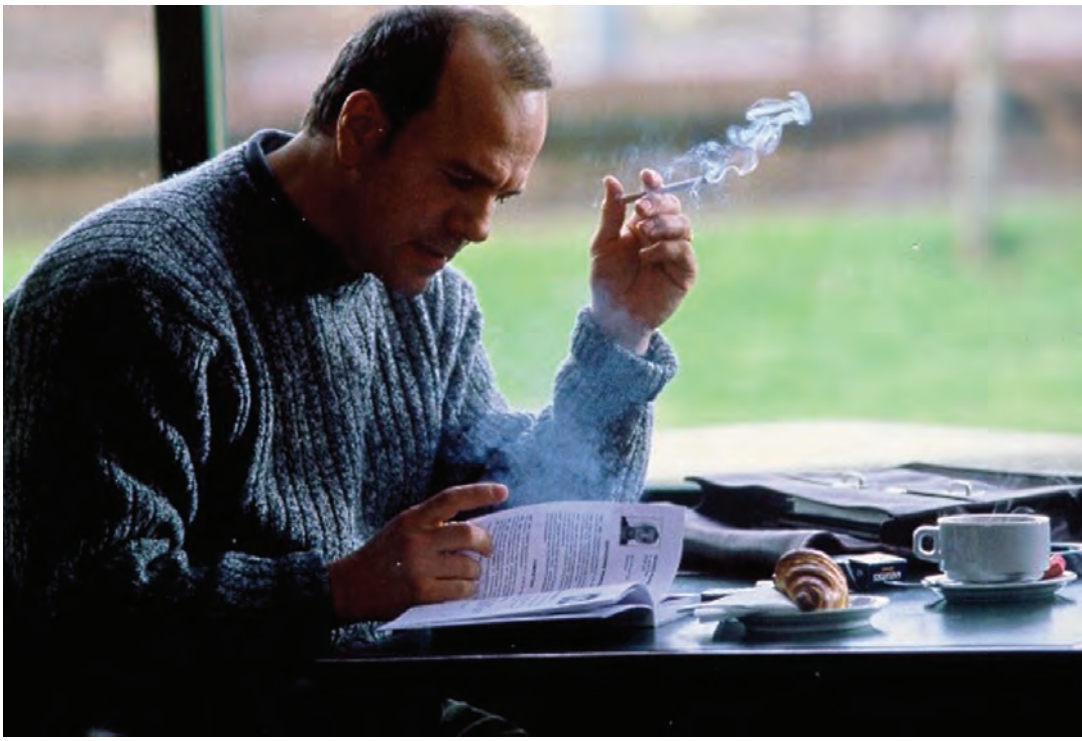

Figure 1: Aurélien Recoing in L'Emploi du temps.

Figure 2: Aurélien Recoing in L'Emploi du temps.

Augé's concept of the *non-lieu* reflects this ambiguity, this longing for an intermediate point between work and the working lifestyle, between familial constraint and the desire for solitude, see figure 1. It is a position whose historical origin Kristin Ross locates in the emergence of the *cadre*, the intermediate link between owner and worker, required by virtue of their 'ideological homelessness' to demonstrate 'a sustained level of mental flexibility and psychological adaptability' (Ross 1995: 171). This 'adaptability', then, is ultimately in the service of ideology, of which the *cadre* through his work is himself part, rather than resistant to it in the way de Certeau might suggest. Similarly, the solitude of the non-place suggests adaptation rather than freedom. The term describes a zone which creates 'neither singular identity nor relations; only … similitude' (Augé 1995: 103). Its appeal is not freedom so much as the suspension of decision-making itself; for, as long as we inhabit it, the non-place – motorways, service stations and hotels, the road itself – delivers us from the burden of individual subjectivity.

In other words, it is the anonymity of similitude that is sought in the non-place: identity is rooted in the identical. The contract made upon entering the non-place is to be the '"average man", defined as the user of the road, retail or banking system' (1995: 100), see figure 2. As with any contract, there are conditions: 'the user of the non-place is always required to prove his innocence' (1995: 101) in the form of the passport, the toll, the ticket; once inside, however, this 'average man' is, or at least feels himself to be, free. Vincent's efforts to demonstrate his 'innocence' are, of course, on borrowed time and money; yet the effort and the risks he undertakes to achieve it indicate its appeal.

The gendering of social space

Despite its linguistic ambiguity, the gendering of this subject (unconscious or otherwise) in both the original French and the English translation suggests to what extent social space, as a product of working and relational practices, is masculine (and heterosexual, if we accept the points about homosocial space I made previously). This, for Kaja Silverman, is the dominant fiction that permeates social and cultural construction. Silverman's argument is that the patriarchal system is not so much a belief as it is 'the ideological reserve upon which belief depends' (Silverman 1992: 27). Drawing on Althusser, Silverman argues that ideological interpellation makes no sense as a mere social construction unless the foundations of the social pave the way for such acceptance. Consequently, it is to psychoanalysis that she turns for explanations, seeing the arousal of the Oedipal complex as a constituent part of maintaining normative heterosexual relations and preserving the 'ideology of the family function' (1992: 39–40).

Discussing *It's a Wonderful Life* (Capra, 1946), Silverman treats it as a road movie which is never realized. Its male protagonist's struggle between familial/geographic identity and his bid for mobility is one that she reads as a form of castration anxiety 'in terms of cultural insufficiency' (1992: 95–6), which, in her paradigm, amounts to the same thing. This, though, leads us back to Aitken and Lukinbeal's assertion that the road movie narrative inevitably risks re-inscribing a hegemonic masculine space. The denial of the feminine and familial, and the embracing of the journey, is

simply an inverse of the Oedipal narrative: indeed, in its affirming of 'self-discovery', in other words the certainty that one is a 'man', it reiterates it. Vincent's practice in *L'Emploi du temps* would therefore appear to run against the grain, and to challenge the trappings of the dominant fiction itself. Yet it is a practice which, eventually, comes close to rupturing all around it. We should therefore examine the true nature of Vincent's actions: does *L'Emploi du temps* ultimately constrain its subject within the dominant order he has sought, albeit ambiguously, to resist? Or is it the case that this ambiguous resistance constitutes an unwitting reiteration of the dominant order itself?

Vincendeau has pointed out the film's gendering of space: Vincent, the man of the outdoors; Muriel, his wife, confined mainly to domestic interiors. Interestingly, though, at the same time as referring to the effective use of the non-place, Vincendeau suggests that Vincent's 'roaming abroad … is a very masculine fantasy' (2002: 32). Perhaps she is here evoking Augé's own imaginary projections of the hurried and harassed (male) traveller:

> Somewhat dreamily, Pierre Dupont put down his magazine. The "Fasten seat belt" notice had gone out. He adjusted his earphones … For a few hours (the time it would take to fly over the Mediterranean, the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal), he would be alone at last.
>
> (1995: 6)

This final sentence is significant in that it stresses the centrality of *solitude* to the non-place and indeed to Cantet's film (it is also strikingly evocative of the entry of the *cadre* protagonist in *Le Huitième jour*, hiding behind an airline sleeping mask before putting on the 'mask' of his working day). As I have remarked, Vincent's (fantasy of) escape, such as it is, involves imitating and inhabiting the everyday itself, of maintaining a simultaneous illusion of normality (the invented job), which in its perverse way – acting as cover for the embezzlement that is supporting himself and his home and family – seems to have its own logic, or even justification, within Vincent's imagination. Consequently, any notion of Vincent's actions as 'masculine fantasy' must be balanced against his ambiguous position, and the fact that, to the extent that the fantasy persists, it is a fantasy of solitude and not 'motorised escape' (Aitken and Lukinbeal 1997: 354). The ambiguity of Vincent – that he requires solitude at the same time as preserving his family life – suggests that it is the process of attaining a happy family life, rather than the result itself, which is troubling.

The non-place exists as a hub of irresponsibility between the 'places' of work: logically, the lure of the former resides therefore in its resistance to the demands of the latter. But what exactly are the demands of 'place'? The film's remarkable use of glass is key here. The buildings in the film, with the notable exception of Vincent's mountain hideaway, are transparent. The result of this is not just that one can observe everyone at work or at play, but that, by inference, the observer is also the object of scrutiny. Yet this transparency is also duplicitous in the sense that glass provides merely the *illusion* of transparency: it is, as Baudrillard argues, 'at once proximity and distance, intimacy and the refusal of intimacy … it is at once magical and frustrating' (Baudrillard 1996: 41–2). As such, the vitreous quality of the film provides

not so much clarity as a series of screens that interpose themselves between bodies rather than permitting their communication. The result of this interposing 'between the materiality of things and the materiality of needs' (Baudrillard 1996: 42) is that the object viewed becomes merely the sign of its own desirability, a component in a system based entirely on lack. That modern capitalist society is founded on this dubious and duplicitous transparency is echoed in Charles Tesson's reading of the film, in which (following Pierre Legendre) he argues that the film evokes society as a fiction, as an image constituted 'through the look [*regard*] of the other, through the path that [Vincent] has taken and which renders him external to himself, other to himself' (Tesson 2001: 74). The sequence in which Vincent visits the UN building in Geneva is illustrative. The glass partitions both project an ideal view of work while excluding the observer from participation. Work, then, as Cantet has suggested, becomes here 'a series of pure signs' (in Vincendeau 2002: 32); while simultaneously, work's visibility makes it an object of projection on the part of the observer, a reflection of one's own bid for plenitude. In invoking Legendre's work on narcissism and the mirror (1994), Tesson here aligns himself with Silverman's arguments. For Legendre, like Silverman, subjectivity – and its mirror, society – is founded on a misrecognition of lack as the paternal authority of law. 'The institution', argues Peter Goodrich, 'is only ever an image of its absent reason or cause' (1997: 13). Law's repressive function must be based not on some external imposition, but on an inherent love of power and of the father.

As Tesson points out, the father haunts the film. It is the father that enters Vincent's house, waking him from his daytime slumber and reminding him of his own paternal role in going to his son's school; it is the father whom a parting Vincent glances back at after having deprived him of the money required to maintain his double life: a double life, however, which serves to support Vincent's own paternal function. Yet it is the imaginary father, in the manner outlined above, that truly dominates the film, in that he forms the basis for Vincent's circular flight away from and back to the home. Within the film's transparent and perpetually scrutinized society, where the look of the other provides the judgement by which the individual subject is constructed, Vincent's redundancy makes him a failure and, his licence as breadwinner revoked, it *unmans* him in the way that Silverman analyses it. What Silverman (after Robert Ray) refers to as the 'strain' in the American post-war film (Silverman 1992: 92) is found here in the increasingly untenable balance between the double lives, rather than a simple frustrated resistance to the domestic pull on the part of the protagonist. Vincent chooses not to reiterate his Oedipal crisis by hitting the road for good: he does not reject the family (that would be to reject the law of the father), but he does reject the vicissitudes and the sheer challenge of the marketplace, which, after all, deprived him of his job in the first place. The end of the twentieth century in France was marked by an increased instability in the employment market, with men like Vincent caught between the two extremes of high-paid security and chronic unemployment (Higbee 2004: 238–39). Inasmuch as *L'Emploi du temps* deals with what happens to the *cadre* when deprived of work, and therefore function, it is a film that treats this society as baseless: Vincent, consequently, lives an illusion, which he nevertheless regards

as his job. In between the untenable poles, Vincent rejects what Cantet calls 'marketable, imposed exertion' (2001), while undertaking his own efforts in the service of the paternal function. In other words, Vincent chooses to be a man, while at the same time rejecting the world of men.

In the context of our argument, then, the non-place must both incorporate and encapsulate the contradiction which I have suggested is at the heart of Vincent's actions. Naturally, one of the first things on which to concentrate here is the ambiguous nature of the space. How is it possible for Vincent both to reject masculine space and at the same time to confirm his masculinity? Kathleen Kirby's comments throw some light on the film's gendering of territories. Kirby argues that outdoor space, moulded and occupied by men, provides a hostile antithesis to the enclosed domestic space of the feminine. Kirby makes the point that agoraphobics are frightened to leave what is defined as a woman's space (1996: 99), her implication being that love of the outdoors is regarded as a masculine property. Clearly, staying at home – unless of course he has 'earned' it – cannot be an option for Vincent. Yet, as I have suggested, the world 'outside' is the world of the marketplace that Vincent essentially rebukes. Kirby's broader comment that 'the problem with space isn't just *space*; it is the fact that there are other people in it – other people who are creating it, determining it, composing it' (1996: 99; Kirby's emphasis), may in her argument be more pertinent to the hostility experienced by women, yet it is reductive to claim this anxiety as a female prerogative. I would argue that what Vincent ultimately seeks to avoid is precisely the proximity of these 'other people'.

The car in social space

The choice of the motor car as the vehicle for Vincent's evasion is both apt and subtle. Notably, Cantet chooses to focus in the main not on the panoramic gaze offered up by the road's trajectory, but on Vincent's position in the car, and therefore on the intimate space of the car itself. The received idea of the car as phallic has, I would suggest, overlooked its dimension as a *uterine* space, as is suggested by Tesson: 'The film's essence is expressed from the very opening shot in which the protagonist, in the foetal position, is born filmically from within his car' (2001: 74). This womb-like quality is accentuated by the limitations to vision: the site of his driving is the anonymity of the motorway or the mountain pass; foggy or rainy landscapes of reduced visibility; night-time drives with their headlamp pools; tunnels with their pulsation of light and dark. This latter feature acts as a visual underscoring of the heartbeat, and in turn the film's other significant effect: its foregrounding of the acoustic register as that which is repressed by the optical. Engine noises, the sound of tyres on tarmac, the lulling chimes which accompany the opening and closing of doors; these all point more toward the maternal than the phallic. Yet it should be clear that the deliberate underplaying of the car's conventionally phallic qualities is to be read within the narrative context; namely, of Vincent's simultaneous and (to him) apparently self-justifying movement of evasion and return. Its uterine dimensions, in other words, mask its gendered inscription as a big boy's toy, permitting the irresponsibility of the aimless drive.

Is the non-place, then, simply the zone of pre-Oedipal regression? To reiterate Augé's point, Vincent's practice is in appearance the pursuit of solitude. The glass panels of his car offer another questionable transparency, yet here it is one that is to a large extent unpeopled. The views it affords are either anonymous or idealized, as in the luminous alpine landscapes that offer Vincent the illusion of independent bliss. Yet when his solitude is invaded – for example, when the motel night watchman wakes him by shining his torch into the car – the spell is broken. It is important then to balance the uterine dimensions of the car and the road not just against what it implies (regression and evasion of responsibility), but also against the fact that it simultaneously offers the *semblance* of responsibility and productivity, in the shape of work (or rather, the movement to and from work, between work commitments). So long as his reveries are undisturbed, the fiction of his employment persists. In other words, there is the suggestion here that Vincent's apparent resistance contains its own tacit affirmation of the productive masculine world.

Baudrillard's conception of the motor car as a component of the 'system of objects' is crucial here, as his argument is rooted implicitly in a Marxist analysis of the correlation between product and producer, between form and function. For Baudrillard, the 'function' of objects can no longer be denoted by their usefulness, their organic relationship to the body's material needs, but rather their play within a signifying system or order (Baudrillard 1996: 63). The car, likewise, needs to play its role within this order: to do so, it signifies its own functionality through its superfluous qualities. Writing in the 1960s, Baudrillard points to extraneous and counterproductive aspects of design such as the tail fin (Baudrillard 1996): in the context of *L'Emploi du temps*, we might point toward the contemporary fad for SUVs such as the oversized off-road vehicle which Vincent buys with his first 'salary'. How to explain the need for these superfluous machines (given that they are hardly ever driven off-road) other than in their signifying of a *potential* mobility, a vehicle that virtually bespeaks its own independence?

More importantly, the height, roominess and protective shell of such vehicles also signifies the process and the achievements of work, on a number of levels. Its expense, space and sense of reinforcement connotes the affluent family unit as the components of a successful career. While advertising its own independence and security, in reality the off-road vehicle signifies its preservation of the heterosexual pair-bond (that produces families) as the goal and result of labour. As this point would suggest, the SUV is no less gendered or phallic than the sports car, though in much subtler ways (naturally, the sports car's self-evident signifying properties now disqualify it from the system: it can only be ironic). As Baudrillard adds, the ownership and use of the motor vehicle 'is a sort of passport, a letter of credit' (Baudrillard 1996: 66). Augé's point, that entry to the non-place is based on the proof of 'innocence', is resonant here: yet what Augé and Baudrillard only imply is the centrality of a *gendered* subjectivity to this condition of entry. As Vincent's bid to imitate the transitional spaces of working life suggests, entry to the non-places of roads, hotels and service stations involves not so much innocent solitude as its illusion, implying as it does the *membership* which has otherwise been deprived

him: membership of a club dominated by men. It is no accident that Augé's imaginary business traveller is male; likewise, we again note the unconscious and ambiguous gendering of Baudrillard's alienated human that we might infer from his account: 'Man has to be reassured about his power by some sense of participation' (Baudrillard 1996: 49); 'in the global process … man is merely the role, or the spectator' (1996: 56).

In other words, then, we can argue that the critiques of (super-)modernity offered by Augé and Baudrillard are naturalized as a universal malaise, while in fact betraying their origins as a symptom of masculine insufficiency. While their observations of our culture's signifying systems are apt, they can be viewed as a masculine response to a world no longer conforming to man's (*sic*) desires. We might argue in fact that what so alarms critics such as Baudrillard – here, superfluity – is in fact play, even camp, and the possibility of radically challenging subjectivity. Vincent may play a dangerous game, yet his tastes are never anything but catholic.

Indeed, the inference from Ross's work, with her emphasis on the structuralist project's foreclosing of debate and the elimination of history, is that 'modernization' acted as a sublimated form of masculine reassertion, albeit without the machismo (1995: 175–96). The *cadre*'s discipline and the technocrat's hegemonic position within government and industry would ensure modernization's unquestioned progress: given, then, the naturalized gendered division of work/home which had in part persisted until this period, this 'rebuilding' of the nation would take on an implicitly masculine shape. Vincent's efforts to maintain the appearance of normality rather than exceptionality can be read, therefore, in the light of conformity as a means of *affirming* masculinity, rather than denying it. Gender, after all, involves a recognition of group, of belonging: Vincent heads off the threat to his masculinity through simulation, not evasion. By reconfiguring the horrific source material within the form of the realist melodrama, with the employment crisis as backdrop, Cantet's film resituates the strangeness of the Romand case within, and resulting out of, a political context. If the extremity of the Romand case implicitly affirms the sanctity of the paternal and familial function, *L'Emploi du temps* evokes its strain and illusions.

Conclusion: the lure of the (cinematic) road

We can see that the wording of the film's title conveys the ambiguities that resonate throughout the film. Hinting both at the regulatory effects of time upon the subject, and also the *uses* of this time possessed by this same subject, it gets to the heart of the non-place and its contradictions. The film, as I have argued, ultimately depicts Vincent's actions as delusional, coded within the masculine world of employment that Vincent wishes both to evade and to embrace; at the same time, it suggests how the subject can be both within and outside the system. Cinematically, Cantet's focus on the road itself, which nevertheless always leads back to the family, emphasizes the pleasures afforded by the road genre, whilst never strictly abandoning the sphere of work and productivity. It is this oscillation that makes it such a pertinent commentary not just on the world of work, but on the social practice of cinema itself. Throughout the film, and especially in its opening sequences, Cantet takes what normally constitute

the elliptical passages of narrative – transition between places, movement around places – and makes it the narrative subject. It is precisely their superfluity, their capacity *not* to constitute any significant plot development, which make these features of the road film attractive. We might even argue that the pleasures of cinematic journeying are not so much informed by, as inform, journeying itself. Historically, cinema and the car, with its own cinema (wind)screen, have developed in tandem, and with it a similar development in consciousness. This is what Slavoj Žižek argues when he writes that the car passenger experiences 'a loss of any continuity between inside and outside … external objects are as if fundamentally unreal, their reality suspended in parentheses: a kind of cinematic reality' (Žižek 1999: 19–20). Of course, it is this fundamental *un*reality which offers the subject a break from the burden of subjectivity: here, the cinematic road trip becomes its own non-place. It enacts a kind of *flânerie* which, paraphrasing Zygmunt Bauman, is not so much freedom as a play of freedom, requiring the tacit agreement between players to ignore the subject's inherent connection to the system, in order to preserve it (Bauman 1994: 141–47).

As I have suggested, then, this suspension of the subject is untenable. Vincent cannot keep driving forever. The tension between the fantasy of non-productive expenditure afforded by the road (film) trip, and the material realities of endless and effortless journeying, cannot hold. Vincent's efforts to escape this paradigm result, inevitably, in failure; yet it is vital to Cantet's cinema of commitment that his efforts are both understood and, to a degree, embraced. The freedom of the road is an illusion, a cinematic fantasy; yet its increasing prominence as fantasy in the era of late capitalism – as suggested by the films cited previously, and a burgeoning interest in the form within the postmodern geographies of contemporary Europe (Mazierska & Rascaroli 2006) – underlines its symptomatic nature. By exploring the nature of escape as a constituent part of the masculine bourgeois idyll, *L'Emploi du temps* queries the brittle construction of the latter, uneasily balanced throughout in the mid-point between work and non-work, between commitment and solitude.

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Another Deleuzian Resnais: *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961) as conflict between sadism and masochism

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Abstract

The Deleuzian reading of L'Année dernière à Marienbad *proposed here draws less on what has become a virtually canonical concept in film studies – Deleuze's time-image – than on a much earlier work by the same author,* Masochism, *which treats sadism and masochism as qualitatively different symbolic universes. Resnais's film, with its deployment of mirrors and statuary and its suggestion of a contract between the characters A and X, presents striking resemblances to the world of masochism as described by Deleuze (drawing on the work of Theodor Reik). At the same time, the role of the third protagonist, M, like that of Robbe-Grillet who wrote the screenplay, has Sadean overtones, suggesting that it might be possible to read the film with its diegetic ambiguities as a Möbius strip linking the sadistic and the masochistic world not only with each other, but with the crystalline universe of the time-image.*

Keywords

masochism
sadism
time-crystal
Deleuze
Resnais
Robbe-Grillet

This article offers a Deleuzian reading of Alain Resnais. That statement might provoke a slightly weary sense of *déjà lu* for such readings have become fairly common currency in film studies, particularly in the dozen or so years since Deleuze's death – not least because of the extraordinary range of films dealt with in the two volumes of *Cinéma* (1983 and 1985) and the prominence accorded by the analyses therein to the literal incorporation of time into the filmic image. Few films demonstrate this better than Alain Resnais's *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*/*Last Year in Marienbad* (1961) – hereinafter *Marienbad* – based on a screenplay by Alain Robbe-Grillet.[1] *Marienbad* centres on the attempt by the central male character, X (Giorgio Albertazzi), to persuade A (Delphine Seyrig) that they had loved each other a year earlier, a version of events she resists before (perhaps) her final acceptance. Deleuze's reading of *Marienbad* as a topology of time in which different chronological strata coexist within and between images has greatly influenced writers on the film (see Leutrat 2000, Wilson 2006, Liandrat-Guigues & Leutrat 2006).

My Deleuzian reading of *Marienbad*, however, will draw comparatively little on the time-image and its ramifications, though the concept is so fundamental to the film that it would scarcely be possible to avoid it even were that to be thought desirable. My scene of action, to reprise Freud, will be different, drawing not upon *Cinéma*, but upon Deleuze's early *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*/*Masochism* (1967), which analyses Masoch's 1870 novel

1. It should be noted that in extremely important respects the Robbe-Grillet text published by Les Editions de Minuit, from which quotations in this article are taken, does not correspond to the film as released. Robbe-Grillet describes it as 'basically the text given to Resnais before shooting' (Robbe-Grillet 1961: 17), and much of the dialogue does not figure in the film itself, while conversely the 'white-out' sequence to be described later is not present in the published text. All translations from the French here are my own unless otherwise stated.

Figure 1: A (Delphine Seyrig) in L'Année dernière à Marienbad.

Venus In Furs, reproduced along with Deleuze's analysis, to inscribe masochism as a qualitatively different symbolic universe to that of sadism, and arguing that *Marienbad* in the light of that text can appear as a rivalry between the sadistic and the masochistic realm – a rivalry whose issue, inevitably for so hyper-ambiguous a film, is indeterminate, though tending perhaps towards the ascendancy of masochism. The images and tropes of masochism as detailed by Deleuze are so vividly and insistently present in Resnais's film that it can almost be seen as a *mise en images* of the Deleuze text, and this is the light in which I propose to read it, without I hope doing violence to its inescapable plurality.

Deleuze argues against the widely-held view that masochism is the necessary complement of or other to sadism (as in the misleading portmanteau expression 'sado-masochism'), viewing it instead as 'a separate world, with other techniques and other effects' (Deleuze 1967: back cover). The distinctive iconography of masochism, dominated by statues, stone women and 'a suprasensual emotionality, surrounded with ice and protected by fur' (1967: 46–47), is not a matter of arbitrary aesthetic choice, but culturally and psychically overdetermined. Deleuze makes much of Masoch's origins at the boundary of Central and Eastern Europe. He was born in Lemberg in Austria-Hungary, now Lviv and part of Ukraine, though his adult life was lived in what is now Austria, and became an ardent pan-Slavist, a disciple of Pushkin and Lermontov. The glacial imagery that pervades his work is linked by Deleuze to this Slavic fascination. Marienbad is in what is now the Czech Republic, but Resnais's film was shot in a number of Bavarian châteaux, so that its location (in so far as such a term can be used of a film so spatially elusive) echoes Masoch's ambivalent positioning at the intersection of *Mitteleuropa* and Slav territory.

More significant still to this study is the psychic determination of masochism. For Deleuze it is radically different from sadism, which ruthlessly and repeatedly imposes what Lacan calls the Law of the Father. The Law here is not susceptible to rational debate or modification (nobody argues against Sade's libertines); Deleuze describes it, in terms reminiscent of Kafka, as 'such that we do not know what it is, nor can we

know' (1967: 73). To this blind and deaf tyranny of the patriarchal superego and its Law, Deleuze opposes the maternal and matriarchal world of the masochist, which seeks to punish and indeed to exclude the father by way of a contract between the chastising mother-figure and the chastised male. Deleuze here draws extensively on Theodor Reik's *Masochism in Modern Man*, written twenty years before Resnais made his film but a striking prefiguration of it in many ways. For Reik, '[m]asochistic practices are but an acting out of preceding phantasies, daydreams that are transferred into reality' (Reik 1941: 49), in which 'what the person at first imagined has to be put into action in mirror scenes' (1941: 51) – remarks surely pertinent *avant la lettre* to *Marienbad* – and he formulates the lability of the masochistic fantasy in terms strikingly evocative of the ambiguous roles of A, M and X in the film:

> It is not always obvious with whom the phantasying person identified. Certainly with the victim, the passive person of the scene, but also with the active cruel figure. Frequently he identifies with a nonparticipating spectator who nevertheless is mysteriously familiar with the thoughts and sentiments of the active and the passive person of the scene.
>
> (1941: 54–55)

Also prominent in *Marienbad* is what Reik terms 'the preponderance of the anxiety factor and the tendency to prolong the suspense' (1941: 59). Reik does not, however, allude to Masoch's novel, whose 'hero', Séverin, proposes a contract to his beloved, Wanda, which will transform him from lover to slave ('"You are my chattel, a toy I can break if that gives me a moment's pleasure"'; Deleuze 1967: 172). For Deleuze the hidden agenda of this contract is the transfer of power from the father to the mother, so that when the masochist is punished it is 'the image of the father in him that is miniaturised, beaten, ridiculed and humiliated' (Deleuze 1967: 53). This may all appear quite alien to *Marienbad*, in many ways a decorporealized film and certainly one from which physical violence and chastisement are entirely absent. We may, however, recall that the original screenplay, by the novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet whose work is infamous for its suspect wallowing in violent sexual fantasy, included a scene in which A was to be taken by force by X. This was replaced during shooting by a sequence, of which more anon, in which A is seen, in heavily over-exposed white footage, repeatedly advancing towards X with arms outstretched – a swooningly ecstatic appearance we may think of the masochist's fantasized mother, who is not only punitive, but in another of her avatars a hetaera or consecrated courtesan. It is as if the battle between sadism and masochism, which I argue to be central to the film, had been fought out and resolved in favour of the latter, between screenwriter and director.

It is in one sense difficult to localize that battle precisely within the text of *Marienbad*, given the film's evident recalcitrance to a narrativization it at the same time inescapably invites. As Youssef Ishaghpour says: 'There is not really a narration, but a combination of narrative units, based on a few fragments of words and a few images' (Ishaghpour 1982: 195). Nevertheless one point – the degree zero of the film's 'plot'? – from which it would be difficult to dissent, is that the film centres on a conflict of fantasy

or desire involving two men – X and M (Sacha Pitoëff) – and the woman A (see figure 1). How far might this conflict be seen as an intertextual echo of that between sadism and masochism in the very specific senses in which Deleuze uses those terms?

There is an asymmetry between the schema just outlined and the shifting balance of forces in Resnais's film which may put us on our guard against any straightforward mapping of Deleuze's binary antithesis onto the triangular structure of *Marienbad*, making it impossible to equate any of the characters – if such they can be called – with a sadistic or a masochistic perspective. The lability of the masochist's fantasy evoked by Reik suggests rather that it might be appropriate to resort to the figure of the Möbius strip, beloved of the artist Escher, which can be made by twisting a length of paper through 180 degrees and joining its ends together. This gives a one-sided surface, so that it is possible to draw a line along it without ever crossing an edge. The topological paradox of the Möbius strip fits it particularly well for a discussion of the multiple uncertainties of *Marienbad*; Sarah Leperchey indeed uses the analogy in her reading of it as 'a film to which one can apply Deleuze's words on the crystal-image: everything has an echo, everything turns back on itself' (2000: 81). The crystal-image, for Deleuze, is intimately connected with the time-image, often as in *Marienbad* manifesting itself in a mirror. Thus Deleuze says of the film that 'the two great theatre scenes are images in a mirror (and the whole *Marienbad* hotel is a pure crystal, with its transparent face, its opaque face and the exchange between them)' (1985: 102). To the exchange between the two faces of the time-crystal corresponds the paradox of the Möbius strip, which may appear to be two surfaces, but is actually one. Using this analogy, it might be possible to say that within the film sadism and masochism, while remaining distinct universes, inhabit the same curiously-configured textual space, so that a reading of the film along these lines – or along this line – can take us endlessly from one to the other and back again. If a Möbius strip is cut in half along its central line, rather than falling into two as the topologically unwary might believe, it remains a single one-sided surface, defying 'common sense' binary expectations, much as the battle between sadism and masochism in *Marienbad* resists any definitive narrative resolution.

Yet that battle is suggested right from the start of the film, before any of the characters or indeed any human presence becomes visible. As the camera tracks across the ponderous baroque architecture of the hotel, X's voice is heard saying:

> Once more I make my way forward, once more, through these corridors, through these salons, these galleries, in this building from another century, this immense, luxurious, baroque, lugubrious hotel, where interminable corridors succeed other corridors that are silent, deserted, burdened with a cold and sombre décor of wood, stucco, moulden marble panels, dark mirrors, dark-hued paintings, columns, heavy drapings…
>
> (Robbe-Grillet 1961: 22–23)

The hotel as it bears heavily down upon X can be seen as a concretization of the superego central to sadism for Deleuze, a superego arguably represented

in the film, as we shall see, by M. That superego, following Lacan and Žižek, might be called the 'Big Other', the framing and ordering instance of that Law which the masochist – who strategically at least can here be identified with X – seeks to avoid and effectively to destroy: 'To the institutional superego, he opposes the contractual alliance of the ego and of the oral mother' (Deleuze 1967: 111). The 'institutional superego' may speak through M, as in the repeated game, played first with matchsticks then with dominoes, which he invariably wins, but it is most strikingly present in the form of that hotel which X and A, on one reading at least, escape at the end.

The play which is being performed in that hotel at the beginning suggests, in the frozen motionlessness of its actors and its audience alike, a kind of *tableau vivant* reminiscent of Deleuze's assertion that 'masochistic scenes need to fix themselves like sculptures or tableaux, to double sculptures or tableaux themselves, to double themselves in a mirror or a reflection' (1967: 61). *Marienbad*'s opening can be viewed as a *mise en décor* as well as a *mise en images* of Deleuze's statement, the mirrors, the sculptures – or at least carvings, in preparation for the sculpture *stricto sensu* that is to come – and the reflections all present and correct. So tableau-like is the play that even when the woman pronounces to her (presumed) lover the words: 'There, now, I am yours' (Robbe-Grillet 1961: 30), neither moves. This is implausible by the canons of realism, but eminently in accord with the Deleuzian masochist's obsession with frozenness, a fixation upon fixation that does not so much deny sensual *rapprochement* as transcend it, or as Monique David-Ménard puts it, 'suspend sensuality to create a supra-sensory world of feeling' (2005: 35).

The allegation made by one of the guests in the hotel, 'He was the one who had set up the whole business, so that he knew in advance all the possible resolutions' (Robbe-Grillet 1961: 40), could thus apply with equal force to the Sadean 'control freak', or to the masochist's preoccupation with the fixity and reflection that shut down the prospect of mutability and the unknown – between, we might say, M and X in their rivalry, already figured by the card game. X's 'You are still the same. I feel as if I had left you only yesterday' (1961: 47) thus works to preserve A in the 'supra-sensory world of feeling' evoked by David-Ménard, a world which 'explores what it means to construct a fantasy for two' (Wilson 2006: 73). That fantasy is figured most significantly by the classical statue near the terrace looking onto the hotel garden, initially not seen but described by X, who says that the previous year A had asked him who the man and woman represented were, and that he had said that he did not know. Stone women are important in Masoch's iconography; he likens Wanda to 'Venus, the beautiful stone woman' (Deleuze 1967: 133), so that when X goes on to say: 'You put forward several suggestions, and I said that it might as well be you and I' (Robbe-Grillet 1961: 60), we appear to find ourselves firmly in the masochistic universe. That, however, would be to underestimate the ambiguities of a film that can also be said to bring its statue to life as does Masoch's narrator ('Yes, she came to life for me. Like that statue that one day began breathing for its creator'; Deleuze 1967: 133). Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues draws attention to 'the gestural ambiguity of the two characters, one with hand raised as though to stop the other moving

forward, the other's arm pointing towards something which will never be seen' (1994: 46), and goes on to speak of the statue as 'the *mise en abyme* of the film' (1994: 47), foregrounding thereby the undecidability of movement and stasis within *Marienbad*'s Möbius-like textual space. The statue is first seen, in one of the film's many diegetically unanchored shots, with no characters in frame. Shortly afterwards A is seen standing next to it while X directs her movements ('You were alone, a little to one side. You were standing, slightly at an angle, against a stone balustrade on which your arm was resting, your arm half-outstretched'; Robbe-Grillet 1961: 71), as if she were another effigy to be brought, Pygmalion-like, to life. Control over another's movements is a fundamental feature of the Sadean universe, whose victims often have no bodily autonomy at all; this is however not entirely true of the shot just described, where at first 'A does not adopt the pose indicated by the text we hear' (1961: 72), though she subsequently complies with X's directions, suggesting a contract between the two – thus, a masochistic relationship in Deleuzian terms – rather than the imposition of any kind of law. That interpretative contract finds fuller expression in their fantasia around the statue, in which for X the man has perceived some danger and is seeking to dissuade the woman from advancing further – thus, to remain suspended – while A conversely suggests that the woman is pointing out 'something – but something marvellous' (1961: 74) that might await them. The statue for X at any rate might be said to constitute a masochistic fetish in the sense deployed by Deleuze: one whose 'inner force' is constituted by 'its power to suspend or to fix' (Deleuze 1967: 65).

In *Venus in Furs*, Séverin's contractual union with Wanda turns out to be a temporary one, for the repressed father returns at the end in the shape of her mysterious lover, known only as 'the Greek', who takes over the punitive role from Wanda and brings Séverin's parthenogenetic fantasy to a cruel end. M's intervention, coldly pointing out that the statue represents Charles III and his wife 'taking an oath before the Diet, during their trial for treason' (Robbe-Grillet 1961: 79), in like vein interrupts the ambiguous dialogue between A and X, the law of harsh fact breaking into their shared fantasy.[2] This, however, marks the end of an episode rather than as in Sacher-Masoch that of the main narrative, and we are to see A several times thereafter ambiguously complying or failing to comply with X's recounting of their supposed shared past, as though the conflict between Sadean law and masochistic contract could not be definitively resolved in one direction or the other.

That formulation is itself perhaps misleading, too closely confined as it is to the narrative elements of the film. Decor and iconography are equally important in articulating its manifold ambiguities, and indeed, as the key example of the statue shows, it is often impossible to locate with any precision the frontier between narrative and these traditionally more static or tableau-like elements. Reik's statement that 'what the person at first imagined has to be put into action in mirror scenes' is strikingly true of *Marienbad*, in whose decor mirrors play a significant part. Lacan's crucial concept of the mirror stage (or phase as it is sometimes known) was supposedly first expounded at a psychoanalytic congress in Marienbad in 1936, though the text of that intervention is nowhere to be found – appropriately

2. Or what at least appears to be harsh fact; I have been unable to trace any reference to a historical monarch of whom this assertion might be true.

according to T. Jefferson Kline following Jane Gallop, for 'the very subject of "The Mirror Stage" is "in some way alien to the logic of chronology" ' (Kline 1992: 55). Mirrors in *Marienbad* refract and multiply action at the same time as they immobilize it, eminently in accord with the 'freeze-frame' logic of masochism and its at least implicit opposition to the logic of chronology.

This is particularly marked in the scenes that take place in A's room, described as 'the imaginary room' (Robbe-Grillet 1961: 124) almost as if it were an antechamber to the mirror stage. The room features a painting of a hunt scene in the snow, a trope reminiscent of that *Venus in Furs* named for the goddess of hunting, whose heroine is likened to 'a great white she-bear ploughing my body with her claws' (Deleuze 1967: 190). We see A at one point multiply reflected in a triptych of mirrors itself reflected within a larger mirror, immediately after and in spite of which she denies even knowing X and disclaims any knowledge of 'that ridiculous bed, that mantelpiece with its mirror' (Robbe-Grillet 1961: 127) – a refusal not only of the site of eroticism, but of the need for masochistic scenes 'to double themselves in a mirror or a reflection', to reprise Deleuze. X nevertheless insists ('If that were true, why would you be here?'; 1961: 127), and A acknowledges that (as we have seen a moment before) 'The mirror is above the chest of drawers … There is also a dressing-table with a mirror' (1961: 128). The Sadean and the masochistic universe here at once vie and coexist, through X's direction of A's memories and movements ('narrative' and control) on the one hand, and the deployment of mirrors and doublings ('decor' and stasis) on the other.

One possible resolution of the love triangle is M's shooting of A, who is then seen lying dead on the floor. François Weyergans describes this in terms strikingly prefigurative of Deleuze ('The superego is the agent of justice and the death he/it desires is that of the id, which can be reached only by way of the ego'; 1961: 24). Given that for Deleuze masochism is the realm of the ego and sadism that of the superego, this would seem to represent the final triumph of the latter over the former, save only that this denouement is immediately and summarily rejected by X ('No, that ending is not the right one … It's you alive I need'; Robbe-Grillet 1961: 155). Shortly after this A is seen arranging a number of identical photographs of herself in the gardens into the form of the cards in the game at which M has always beaten X. The 'original' photograph – if such a thing can be said to exist – has been seen before in A's possession, seemingly providing proof that she and X had indeed met the year before. A's disposition of its replicas serves as an almost textbook illustration of Reik's assertion that 'what the person at first imagined has to be put into action in mirror scenes', and perhaps also as a hint that she may be able to beat the Sadean, and conceivably homicidal, superego at its/his own game.

The hypothesis of A's violent possession by X is brusquely refuted, at first verbally ('No, no, no! That's wrong! It wasn't by force'; 1961: 165) and then visually too via the over-exposed series of shots referred to earlier. Here she is clad in a white feathered negligee reminiscent of the 'light white *déshabillé*' (Deleuze 1967: 134) worn by Wanda when Séverin first makes her acquaintance. The ecstatic quality of these shots is so overwhelming that it seems to go beyond the diegesis to incorporate the spectator

('she seems repeatedly to welcome the viewer with outstretched arms'; Kline 1992: 71), marking thereby the end of X's waiting and A's transformation from 'icy-emotional-cruel' (Deleuze 1967: 45) mother to jubilantly greeting hetaera. Has X emerged victorious not only from his battle with M, but from that masochistic universe whose ideal is to 'bring about the triumph of emotion by way of icy coldness' (1967: 46)?

The temptation is to say yes, but an important countervailing factor needs to be taken into consideration. This is the absence of X from the over-exposed shots, an absence which enables Kline to speak of A's welcoming the viewer, but at the same time eliminates any possibility of sensory contact between her and X. Slavoj Žižek observes pertinently apropos the ending of James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997) that when Rose (Kate Winslet) exclaims, with the dead Jack (Leonardo di Caprio) in her arms: 'Nothing can take us apart! I'll never let you go!':

> [T]he act that accompanies these pathetic words is the opposite gesture of *letting him go*, of gently pushing him away, so that he gets sucked into the dark water – a perfect exemplification of Lacan's thesis that the elevation to the status of symbolic authority has to be paid for by the death, murder even, of its empirical bearer.
>
> (Žižek 1999: vii)

Could A's outstretched arms not likewise be seen as pushing X away at the same time as they welcome him, thereby ambiguously granting and denying him the 'status of symbolic authority' that acceding to his version of events would confer? Jean-Luc Nancy's essay '*Noli me tangere*' – the risen Christ's injunction to Mary Magdalene – dwells on the ambivalence of touching in a manner that outstrips its specifically Christological context. For him Christ's words imply 'do not seek to touch or to hold on to what is essentially moving away, and in so doing touches you with its very distance' (Nancy 2003: 30). This is later glossed, in words that could be applied to Wanda's final abandonment of Séverin, as: 'You hold nothing, you cannot hold or hold on to anything, and that is what you must love and know. That is what a loving knowledge is all about. Love what escapes you, love the one who is going away. Love their going away' (2003: 61).

In this light A's 'welcome', sensuous though it undeniably is, can also be seen following David-Ménard as 'suspend[ing] sensuality to create a supra-sensory world of feeling', leaving, that is to say, X within the close-yet/because-distant world of the Deleuzian masochist rather than transcending it towards some more fusional realm. Even this, however, does not appear sufficiently ambiguous in the light of the film's ending, in which A and X leave the hotel together observed by the crestfallen M. The Möbius-strip structure of the narrative is reasserted in the final words of the film, spoken by X:

> The park of this hotel was a kind of French-style garden, without trees, flowers or any kind of vegetation … Gravel, stone, straight lines marked out rigid spaces, surfaces without mystery. It seemed, at first, impossible to get lost there … at first … along the rectilinear pathways, between the statues with

Figure 2: The park at Marienbad.

> their fixed gestures and the granite paving-stones, where you were now already in the process of getting lost, for ever, in the quiet night, alone with me.
>
> (Robbe-Grillet 1961: 181)

The park here, described as an entirely human-made and inorganic space, comes to resemble an extension of the chilly baroque corridors with which the film began (see figure 2). M the Sadean superego is unquestionably defeated, but is that to say that the ending represents the triumph of X the masochist? This would indeed be to 'apply' the Deleuzian dichotomy somewhat too rigidly, something I hope I have avoided thus far. Neither in Masoch's novel nor in Deleuze's essay is there any real sense of what 'triumph' for the masochist would mean, and indeed, given the centrality of stasis and postponement in his desire, such a notion might well appear a (psycho) logical impossibility. The best that he might hope for would be an eternity of frozen suspension, which the film's final words and image seem to suggest. Séverin's story in *Venus In Furs* is enclosed within a rueful framing narration reflecting on the self-destructive nature of the teller's desire, reminiscent of that which encompasses the first-person narrator's tale in Balzac's *Sarrasine* (1830), analysed by Roland Barthes in *S/Z* (1970). In *Marienbad*'s narrative world, such a linear structure of enclosure is impossible, but X's final words might appear to gesture towards it while at the same time freezing his, and the film's, desire in the 'time-crystal' evoked in *Cinéma*. The Deleuze who differentiates sadism from masochism and the Deleuze who

defines and analyses the cinematic time-image may appear to inhabit different conceptual spaces, but the frozenness of *Marienbad* can be seen as operating a Möbian linkage between those two Deleuzian texts, as well as between the discrete universes of sadism and masochism, and thus conceivably between the film-text and the various contexts in which it offers itself to be read.[3]

3. Thanks are due to Lisa Downing for her helpful comments on this article.

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Pierre Batcheff, the surrealist star

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Abstract

Pierre Batcheff was one of the foremost jeunes premiers *of 1920s cinema. Unlike his fellow stars, he despised the commercial films he made, and engaged with the surrealists and their sympathizers, leading to his role as the Man in* Un chien andalou *in 1929. In this article, we argue that Batcheff's performance style, which more often than not involved distancing himself from the action and from his female screen partners, and his star persona as the exotic other, contributed to make him what might seem like a contradiction in terms: a surrealist star. We show how the ideological preoccupations of the surrealists at the end of the 1920s, whether in relation to literature (Breton), painting (Dalí), or cinema (Artaud), intersected with those of Batcheff, making him an exemplary uncanny object, as defined by Hal Foster's work on surrealism.*

Keywords

Pierre Batcheff
surrealism
masculinity
André Breton
Antonin Artaud
Salvador Dalí

Pierre Batcheff is best known today as the Man of the avant-garde classic, *Un chien andalou*/*An Andalusian Dog* (1929), by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, made as a result of Batcheff meeting Buñuel during the production of *La Sirène des tropiques*/*The Siren of the Tropics* (1927), for which Buñuel was an assistant director. By 1929 Batcheff was one of France's top stars, while Buñuel and Dalí were unknown outside a small surrealist circle. As late as 1975, Batcheff was still considered to be the best French actor of the period 1925–1929 by Georges Sadoul, who was originally part of the surrealist group (Sadoul 1975: 106). Batcheff's biography is striking for his rapid rise to stardom, and the fact that he was, unlike many of his peers, an unwilling star. His first major role was at the age of sixteen in 1924. By the time of his death by suicide in 1932, he had made twenty-five films, two of them being made in alternate language versions. Nine of these premiered in the two-year period 1927–1928. His films were of varying quality, and he quite openly despised many of them. Amongst them, however, there are a number of films by major silent cinema directors: Jean Epstein (*Le Double amour*/*Double Love*, 1925), Marcel L'Herbier (*Feu Mathias Pascal*/*The Late Mathias Pascal*, 1925), Raymond Bernard (*Le Joueur d'échecs*/*The Chess Player*, 1927), Abel Gance (*Napoléon*, 1927), René Clair (*Les Deux timides*/*Two Timid Souls*, 1928), and Henri Fescourt (*Monte-Cristo*, 1929). Nonetheless, he considered the majority of the films he acted in to be no more than hack work, and longed to become a director. This was particularly the case after his involvement with Buñuel, and other members of the surrealist group such as Robert Desnos, this being

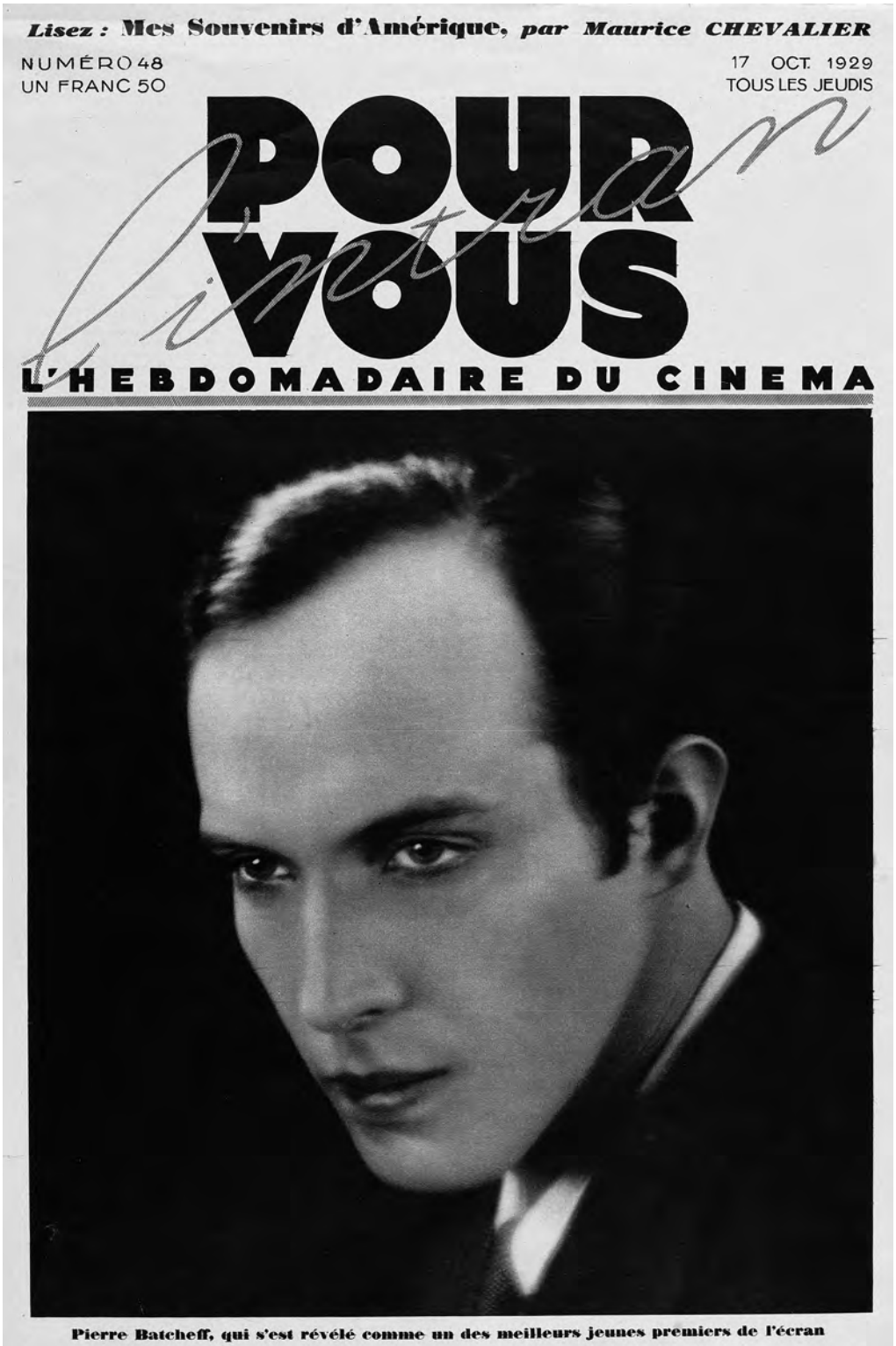
Lisez : Mes Souvenirs d'Amérique, par Maurice CHEVALIER
NUMÉRO 48
UN FRANC 50
17 OCT. 1929
TOUS LES JEUDIS
POUR VOUS
L'HEBDOMADAIRE DU CINEMA
Pierre Batcheff, qui s'est révélé comme un des meilleurs jeunes premiers de l'écran

Figure 1: 'Pierre Batcheff, who is one of the screen's best jeunes premiers' (Pour vous October *1929).*

followed by a very close association with the group forming around Jacques Prévert in the early 1930s, with whom he wrote screenplays. This article will argue that, unlike his fellow stars of the 1920s, Batcheff was what might be considered to be almost a contradiction in terms, a surrealist star, and this for more reasons than his participation in what has often been called the only truly surrealist film.

The *jeune premier*

Batcheff was one of a small group of young stars called *jeunes premiers*, young romantic male leads, and indeed one of the better-known ones (see figure 1). *Pour vous* ran a competition in 1928, just after the premiere of Batcheff's next best-known film, *Les Deux timides*, to decide who the top six *jeunes premiers* were. Batcheff was the only clear French star in a list made up of American and British actors: Walter Byron, Alexandre D'Arcy, Reginald Denny, Douglas Fairbanks, along with Eric Barclay whose career began in the United Kingdom in the early 1920s and who made films in both France and Germany in the mid-1920s (*Pour vous* 1928: 12–13). The *jeune premier* was part of a well-established tradition in French iconography of the nineteenth century, the androgynous ephebe in history painting after the Revolution connoting 'effeminacy, passivity, debility, helplessness and impotence' (Solomon-Godeau 1997: 150). Batcheff also conformed to the image of the Romantic hero much loved by the surrealists. A description of him on the set of *Monte-Cristo* in 1928 plays on key Romantic figures, such as Don Juan, Alfred de Musset and Lord Byron, as well as a key figure for the surrealists from later in the century, child-poet Arthur Rimbaud:

> The lips of a young Don Juan, short laughs, a capricious voice, that comes in fits and starts … Musset at eighteen. And the wilful but also faraway gaze that Byron must have had. Slim as a razor, nervous and quick, he makes you think of the bad boy of legends. His hair isn't ruffled yet, his clothes are not rags, he doesn't have those wide eyes like Rimbaud, but the Romantics would have seen him as a brother.
>
> (Frank 1928: 8–9)

The image of the impotent youth reflected not just a reaction against the virility of the soldier damaged in the male-dominated and very public theatre of the Great War, but also a wish to return to the feminine, associated with domestic and maternal bliss, as Janine Bouissounouse argued in an article in *Cinémonde* in 1933, at a time when the *jeune premier* had changed to a more athletic and proletarian type. Her intentionally ironic sketch, with its almost blasphemous and no doubt unintentional references to the Pieta, could not better describe Batcheff's role in *Claudine et le poussin* (Claudine and the Youngster, Marcel Manchez) at the age of sixteen in 1924: 'After the war, no doubt to find relief from the soldiers … women loved Cherub, a pale and fragile ephebe that you would have liked to cradle in your arms while singing a romance, cover with flowers and pamper' (in Cadars 1982: 21). Her argument does not just apply to film stars, but to some of the surrealist group (and by extension,

Figure 2: Claudine et le poussin (1924): Batcheff lies in Claudine's arms (Dolly Davis) (Collection Roche-Batcheff).

one might argue, to many French intellectuals of the 1920s). Denise Tual, Batcheff's wife, explains in an interview in 1985 that Batcheff

> without being homosexual was a "feminine man", something specific to the times … Take Aragon, Dalí, Éluard: all of them were extremely feminine men who had the habit of looking at themselves in the mirror. Their attitudes, their behaviour, without being specifically homosexual, was attractive to some women'.
>
> (Gilles 2000: 191)

A persistent trope for Batcheff's characters is the passive suffering male, drooping Pieta-like in a woman's arms (see figure 2). And yet, Batcheff's contact with his female partners on screen – amongst them Josephine Baker, Dolly Davis, Claude France, Edith Jehanne, Nathalie Lissenko, Gina Manès, Edna Purviance and Suzy Vernon – is curiously distant; a persistent trope in his star performance is the faraway or downcast look, even as he sits (or, frequently, lies incapacitated) close to the woman he loves, reminiscent of yet another Romantic icon, Percy Bysshe Shelley as we see him washed up dead on a beach in Edward Onslow Ford's Shelley Memorial (see figure 3).

Richard Dyer has shown how the distant or downcast look of the male pin-up functions as a disavowal of objectification. The faraway look is almost

Figure 3: La Sirène des tropiques *(1927): Papitou (Josephine Baker) cares for the wounded André (Courtesy of the Bibliothèque du Film, Paris).*

literally an escape, a spatial displacement from the passivity and commodified objectification of the spectator's gaze; the male pin-up's look off (what we are calling the distant look) 'suggests an interest in something else that the viewer cannot see – it certainly doesn't suggest any interest in the viewer' (Dyer 1992: 104). Dyer also points out that there are pin-ups who stare straight at the camera, and that their gaze to some extent reasserts masculinity by its 'penetrating' nature (1992: 109). Batcheff's gaze is hardly ever straight to camera, however. His gaze is not only looking away or off; it is literally *vacant*. He is there without being there; or, rather he is *there*, somewhere else, rather than being *here*; Batcheff is an absent presence.

The distant look is also a disavowal of the femininity incorporated within that objectification; as Abigail Solomon-Godeau says of the nineteenth century pin-up, the ephebe, he combines 'the edifying and culturally sanctioned universe of male *vertu* and beauty, but leavened with a femininity contained, interiorized, and incorporated' (1997: 175). Femininity is inscribed within the pin-up as the giving-up of the body we see, while the distant look vacates the passive shell of the body; what is 'pinned-up' is a feminine-connoted residue, an abandonment. Masculinity as exemplified by Batcheff cannot be pinned up or pinned down; it is never there where you look because it has always already drifted somewhere else, evacuated. As Dyer has pointed out

Figure 4: L'Île d'amour *(1928): Xénia (Claude France) cares for the wounded Bicchi (Collection Roche-Batcheff).*

in relation to what he calls the Sad Young Man in popular culture: 'The sad young man is not yet a real man. He is soft; he has not yet achieved assertive masculine hardness. The sad young man is a martyr figure [and] embodies a mode of sexuality we might now label masochistic' (Dyer 1993: 42). He relates this historically both to the Romantic poets (whom we have seen are a constituent part of the French ephebe), as well as to Christian tradition of (male) martyrdom, particularly that of Saint Sebastian. Batcheff's characters frequently lie prone and suffering, drooping, passive objects in pain, 'looking off' in more ways than one (see figures 4 & 5).

Batcheff was not just 'vacant', he was also very much 'other'. He was originally an immigrant from a Russian family. There are frequent references in the popular press to his Russian origins, and it is more than likely that his films for the Russians of Montreuil, Films Albatros, would have intensified this association. There were likely to be 'oriental' touches as well, given that in the popular imagination the Russians were considered in the same bracket as the Chinese and Indochinese, a feature reinforced by Batcheff's birthplace in Manchuria, frequently commented on in star portraits. A sketch of French attitudes to the Russians in the 1920s brings out a feature that we shall find in Batcheff, that of the savage other: 'They were both ascetics and hedonists, fatalists and enterprising, tender and violent; the eyes of these disconcerting beings, full of an exquisite sensitivity,

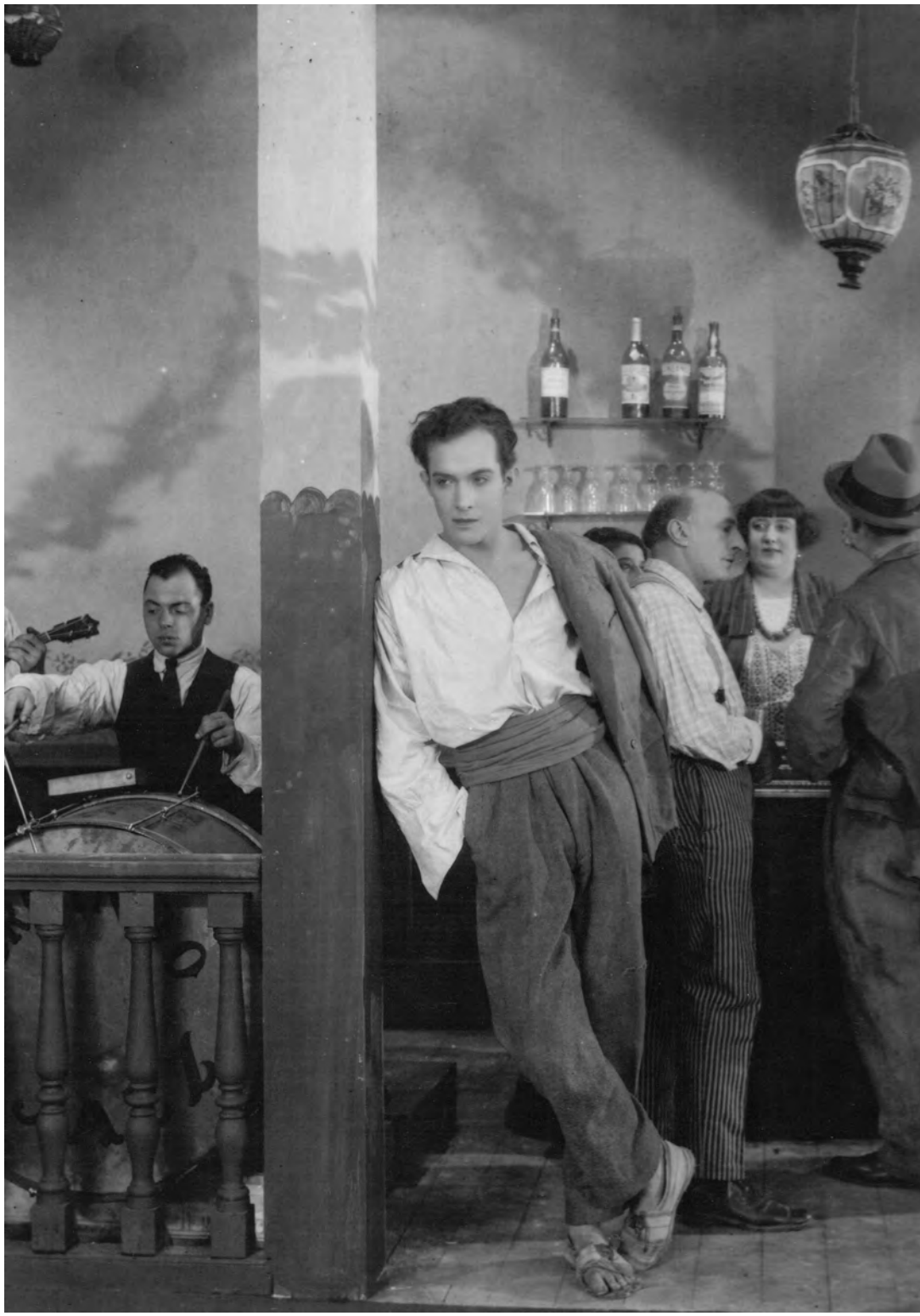

Figure 5: L'Île d'amour *(1928): Batcheff as pin-up with a characteristic distant look (Collection Roche-Batcheff).*

could be shot through with flashes of Asiatic savagery' (Schor 1996: 114). The 'savagery' that Batcheff's ethnic origins might have connoted was tempered by sensitivity, the words 'charming' and 'sensitive' being frequently used to describe him in star portraits. That said, given that the Polish immigrant community was one of the largest in France during the 1920s, as well as being one of the better organized (Schor 1996: 96–97), it is also likely that Batcheff would have been a vehicle for the working out of fantasies and fears relating to the frontiers of 'North Europeanness'. This would have been all the more the case given, first, nervousness in relation to possible 'Bolshevik' leanings of the Russian immigrants, and, second and more generally, the financial crisis of 1926 and the xenophobic discourses it generated (Schor 1996: 65).

Batcheff's Russianness, combined with 'Chinese' exoticism, linked him firmly with Rudolph Valentino, not least when Batcheff accepted Ingram's Berber role in *Baroud* (Rex Ingram, 1932) at the turn of the 1930s (see figure 6). Batcheff's role as Si Hamed was a clear reference to Valentino's *The Sheik* (1921) and *The Son of the Sheik* (1926), and Ramon Novarro's *The Arab* (1924). In this optic, Batcheff was not at all, or at any rate no

Figure 6: Baroud *(1932): Ahmed (Batcheff) draws his knife and prepares to kill André (Rex Ingram) (Photo R. Tomatis, Collection Roche-Batcheff).*

longer, like the pale and fragile nineteenth century European melancholic; he was much more like the New World *jeune premier* so attractive to audiences on both sides of the Atlantic.

Surrealism, simulacra, and haunting

Batcheff's 'vacancy' and otherness are signs of critical distance combined with rejection of the insipid *jeune premier* roles he hated. It is in our view clearly linked to a shift in surrealist thinking in 1928–1929, evident in the work of André Breton, as well as in the work of Dalí, in the form of paranoia-criticism, and also linked to Antonin Artaud's attempt to reconceive cinema language in the mid- to late-1920s.

In the second manifesto of surrealism, which appeared in the same number of *La Revolution surréaliste* as the filmscript of *Un chien andalou*, Breton lamented the fact that automatic writing, seen in the first manifesto of 1924 as one of the main vehicles for achieving the surreal, had in a few short years led to clichés. The reason for this, he suggested, was that those who practised automatic writing had not maintained a sufficient critical distance; aspiring surrealist writers 'were generally content to let their pens run rampant over the paper without making the least effort to observe what was going on inside themselves, this disassociation being nonetheless easier to grasp and more interesting to consider than that of reflected writing' (Breton 1972: 158). Batcheff's 'vacancy' can be seen as a broader ontological imperative, as a means of detachment in the sense used by Breton. Breton distanced himself from the persona adopted as a writer, with a view to bypassing the rational mind, so as to ensure the authenticity of the verbal flux. Batcheff, in a parallel move, distanced himself from the clichéd commercial roles he performed – both in his comments about them, and in the vacant look we have identified as a marker of disconnection from the performance itself – so as to ensure something more authentic, as he himself kept on saying in his star interviews, something closer to (his conception of) the real.

Dalí was an important figure for the surrealists in the period 1929–1934, and his paranoiac-critical method, which Breton suggested could be applied to all the arts including cinema, adds another layer to the issue of distance and disassociation. The paranoiac-critical method, best illustrated in paintings by Dalí such as *Métamorphose de Narcisse* (1937), consists in replacing one image by its transformed or anamorphic double; but in principle, doubling is infinite. An example of the process in *Un chien andalou* is the sequence of dissolves (ants emerging from the hole in the hand, a woman's armpit, a sea urchin, the head of the androgyne). The images thus created are called simulacra by Dalí, and his view of their relationship to 'reality' is close to Baudrillard's simulacra, a key notion of postmodernism: not copies of the real, but the real itself, a dizzying circulation of always-already transformed images (Baudrillard 1981). We would like to argue that the *jeune premier* role is a simulacral image, all the more so in that there is no original image, only a constant circulation of variants of already existing images, performed by others as well as Batcheff. This is well exemplified by the illustration to one of Batcheff's star portraits, where we see a number of his roles pictorialized, neatly disposed in a circle, suggesting the circularity of simulacra (see figure 7).

16
Mon Ciné
Leurs Visages :
PIERRE BATCHEFF
On s'est souvent plaint de l'absence de jeunes premiers en France ; aussi, des artistes comme Pierre Batcheff sont-ils particulièrement appréciés dans nos studios. Il convient de dire toutefois que Pierre Batcheff, s'il est devenu Français d'adoption, est né en Russie. Il plaît beaucoup au public grâce à son talent plein de charme et de jeunesse. Il a débuté dans des films français où il interpréta de petits rôles, mais aujourd'hui, en pleine possession de son métier d'artiste, il interprète les principaux rôles masculins et chaque nouvelle création démontre qu'il est très en progrès. Rappelons quelques-unes des productions dans lesquelles il parut : Destinée, d'Henry Roussell, où il fut un jeune officier de l'armée de Bonaparte qui ne manquait pas d'allure ; Le Joueur d'Échecs, où il fut le digne partenaire de Pierre Blanchar, sous la direction habile de Raymond Bernard ; Napoléon, d'Abel Gance, où il silhouetta le général Hoche ; Éducation de Prince, d'Henri Diamant-Berger, où il fut le jeune prince aux côtés de la grande vedette américaine Edna Purviance ; La Sirène des Tropiques, où il fut le partenaire de la trépidante et amusante Joséphine Baker ; L'Ile d'Amour, de Jean Durand, qui est, certainement, une de ses meilleures créations, sans oublier Le Bonheur du Jour, de Gaston Ravel et Le Perroquet Vert, que nous venons de voir. Pierre Batcheff est un artiste d'avenir.
1
2
3
4
5
6
1. L'artiste dans Éducation de Prince.
2. Dans L'Ile d'Amour.
3. Pierre Batcheff dans La Sirène des Tropiques.
4. Dans L'Ile d'Amour.
5. Pierre Batcheff avait composé une silhouette d'une rare élégance dans Le Joueur d'Échecs.
6. Pierre Batcheff dans Le Perroquet Vert, qui vient d'obtenir un gros succès aux « Agriculteurs ».
Le Gérant : V. MARCHAND.
(Composé à la monotype.)
5779-27. — CORBEIL, IMPRIMERIE CRÉTÉ. — 11-1928.

*Figure 7: 'Leurs visages' (*Mon ciné, *December 1928).*

Artaud's trajectory was very similar to Batcheff's, although there is no evidence that they knew each other. He worked with Charles Dullin in L'Atelier (earlier than Batcheff), and with Georges Pitoëff (later than Batcheff); he took opiates like Batcheff; they both knew Dr Toulouse, the pioneering psychiatrist and Artaud's doctor; he used the cinema to support himself while lamenting its commercialism, like Batcheff; he wrote filmscripts, and like Batcheff, had one of his filmscripts, *La Coquille et le clergyman/The Seashell and the Clergyman* (1928), made into a film by someone else (Batcheff's was *Amour… Amour…*, co-written with Jacques Prévert, and directed after his death by Robert Bibal, 1932). Artaud also acted in a number of films, most famously as Marat in Gance's *Napoléon* (1927), as had Batcheff in the role of General Hoche, but also in *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc/The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1928), and in films by directors with whom Batcheff had also worked: *L'Argent/Money* (Marcel L'Herbier, 1929), and *Tarakanova* (Raymond Bernard, 1929).

In the course of 1927–1928 Artaud wrote a number of pieces concerning *La Coquille et le clergyman*. For Artaud, there are three sorts of cinema (Artaud 1961: 21–22). The first is narrative cinema based on rudimentary psychology, a translation of literary procedures to the screen. The second is pure cinema, which, in common with other surrealists, he dislikes for its formalist lack of emotion. The third type, he claims, is announced by *La Coquille et le clergyman*. Artaud does not abandon psychology, associated with narrative cinema, but claims that the new cinema will show human behaviour in its 'barbarity' (1961: 23), privileging desire over convention. The comments he makes concerning the circulation and disruptive nature of desire are close to Dalí's paranoiac-critical paradigm where an image is anamorphized into a succession of simulacra impelled by desire: 'The woman displays her animal desire, she has the shape of her desire, the ghostly sparkle of her instincts that force her to be the same but ever different in her repeated metamorphoses' (1961: 76).

A second, and rather more difficult notion to understand is Artaud's attempt to create a new language where images are disconnected from rational structures, 'images which emerge exclusively from themselves, and do not draw their meaning from the situation in which they develop but from a sort of powerful inner necessity' (1961: 23). The aim is to do for cinema what Breton had defined as the goal of surrealism in the first manifesto: to find 'the pure work of thought' (1961: 78). Indeed, Artaud suggests that images are redundant in this endeavour; cinema can express thoughts not through images, but 'with the matter that they are made of, without anything coming in-between, without representations' (1961: 80–81). It is clear, however, that 'pure thought', however abstract and difficult to grasp it may be, in these circumstances can only be achieved by the kind of doubling and critical distancing that we have already seen in both Breton and Dalí. Artaud writes that spectators will only really understand his film if they are prepared to 'look deep into themselves' (1961: 82); 'an attentive examination of the inner self' (1972: 67). His scenario *Les Dix-huit secondes* (see Artaud 1961/1972) where 'one futile identification follows another, as the actor's centerless self goes from double to double' (Williams 1981: 29) shows how Artaud was grappling with individual identity as the principal problem in the accession to 'pure thought'. As

Williams points out, and this reflects our view of Batcheff's work more generally, 'the actor has finally hit upon an identification with the actor in himself – with an aspect of himself that is perpetually the reflection of the Other' (1981: 29), in an uncanny doubling which we shall explore below.

We would like to suggest that Batcheff is a surrealist star; indeed, the only one, given that Artaud's relationship to the cinema was rather different. This might seem like the baldest of truisms. By common consent, there are very few 'surrealist' films, and the fact that Batcheff, one of the major commercial stars of the 1920s, acted in one of those very few films, indeed one of the even fewer that are labelled 'surrealist', by definition makes of him a surrealist star in ways that Gaston Modot, the hero of Buñuel and Dalí's next film, *L'Âge d'or*/*The Golden Age* (1930), was not, given that he was no more than a key second player of the French cinema throughout his career. Batcheff, on the other hand, mixed with the surrealists, and not just Buñuel and Dalí: Denise Tual reports that she and Batcheff were close friends of Robert Desnos (interview by Rebillard, November 1994). Moreover, as Tual points out, Batcheff wrote copiously, and in a surrealist mode, both in terms of the speed with which he wrote (an essential for surrealist automatic writing), making it difficult sometimes to read what he had written. But most of all, it is Batcheff's conscious distancing from his roles that point to a key surrealist interest. In a newspaper article he wrote in 1926, Batcheff contrasted cinema and real life, saying that life was 'an infinitely more attractive spectacle from the moment when you have the ability to turn yourself into the spectator of your own comedy' (Batcheff 1926).

The uncanny

In more theoretical terms, Batcheff's critical distance from the roles he played parallels the distance from oneself promoted by Breton in the effort to discover what lies beneath the masks of identity, or as Breton puts it neatly in the first few lines of *Nadja* (1928): to discover whom I haunt. This notion of haunting is fundamental to surrealist aesthetics at the end of the 1920s, as it is to one of the more provocative studies of surrealism of the 1990s, Hal Foster's *Compulsive Beauty*, which argues strongly for a reading of surrealism as an engagement with the uncanny. Two broad points made by Foster are of relevance for our purposes. The first of these is the argument that surrealist objects can be viewed as the 'failed refinding of a lost object' (Foster 1993: xix). We would like to posit that Batcheff functions for the spectator as a 'lost object'. Then we want to consider Foster's productive contrast between two key surrealist figures, that of the automaton and the mannequin, and their link with Hans Bellmer's dolls. We will argue that they are the structuring devices for the performative simulacrum (what we call 'vacancy'), and its transformation into 'evacuation', a partly imposed, partly self-imposed disarticulation of the star-body.

Although clearly Batcheff is not quite like the object found apparently by chance, but rather an object actively sought, we would suggest that his function is similar. This is first because like the found object he is the locus of desire, revealing erotic latencies in the spectator. In this function he is no different we might say than any star. Where he begins to resemble the found object rather more is in his mysterious otherness, the sign of a being-other, of a being-elsewhere, cryptic and dislocated. Batcheff has

Figure 8: Éducation de prince *(1927): Batcheff exoticized and fetishized (Collection Roche-Batcheff).*

always already vacated the location in which he acts; he is, as we suggested earlier, an absent presence, liminally there, but fundamentally elsewhere, figured by his deathly immobility and his deflected gaze, the looking away or off. In that sense he can never be graspable or recoverable.

So what is in the 'there', the location which makes him 'not-here' and unavailable in his fullness? He is a fetish, tightly sheathed in figure-hugging black tails or tuxedos, or draped lasciviously in open-necked silk shirts, coyly revealing his neck and upper chest (see figure 8). The key figure for this in *Un chien andalou*, that repository of symptoms, is the wiping away of his mouth, as Simonne Mareuil, like the spectator, attempts to pin him down with her gaze. Batcheff's man, as earlier in the film, begins to become a woman, as her underarm hair – that has been read by more than one commentator as pubic hair – covers his mouth. The figure signals a double and disarticulated fetish: the penile body hidden beneath the costume is the 'missing' penis of the female, so that Batcheff, like any fetishized body, is rendered passive. This is then overlaid magically with a vagina; but this vagina has disappeared, leaving only what hides it, the hair, in what is a literal effacement and defacement of the male. Batcheff is doubly 'femaled', his maleness forever lost in what is, in the central section of the film, a poignant elegy to ruined masculinity.

Batcheff is also absent because what we see is the past, a dislocation that is temporal as well as spatial. The temporal and the spatial come together in

his otherness, his 'Russianness', connoting the alien culture and the fixed reference point of 1917, even if he did not mix with the White Russians. Batcheff is a *displaced* person. That displacement, we might wish to argue, is a complex mix. It is the result of 1917, a social and historical alienation, a being-displaced; but it is also an enactment, or performance of displacement, a self-alienation (from himself and others). This emerges in comments on his voice: some say he has a Russian accent, others not. Evidence from *Baroud*, the only sound film we have been able to consult in its entirety, suggests not. It is of course entirely possible that spectators imagined a Russian accent where none existed, because this concurred with the otherness of his star persona. But it is not inconceivable that he played on his alienness, performing the border, acting out the cusp. Either way, Batcheff's in-betweenness is always on display, his identity convulsed like the Bretonian definition of beauty: exploding and fixed in the same moment, as we shall discuss below.

As spectators of stars we seek the renewed pleasure of past images, which is by definition lost. We attempt to recapture the identifications experienced as vicarious pleasure in the star body. In that sense, like desire itself, the attempt to capture the star body in its fullness can never succeed, because it is configured as a past experience. The present image of the star body on screen will always be 'read' as a fluid recombination of past images, haunting the present image uncannily precisely because they are from the past. The only way to refresh the image is to convulse it, which is what *Un chien andalou* tries to do. To be able to do so, it must use recognizable images, but reposition them within an unrecognizable context or narrative. The images of Batcheff in *Un chien andalou*, as Richard Abel rightly pointed out, are those we recognize from his previous films (Abel 1984: 483), returning uncannily to haunt the present image; but in addition, those images are distorted and further othered by their unrecognizable narrative context, where, crucially, time is made infinitely pliable, past and present too disarticulated for temporality to function as an anchor for the 'real'. The 'loosening' of time allows the uncanny to slip through in multiple doublings, sliding doors onto impossible landscapes (the first-floor room that suddenly opens onto a windswept beach).

Batcheff's star persona is *essentially* double, in the strongest sense of the word 'essential'; there are no spatial or temporal contingencies to constrain that uncanny doubling. This helps us to understand the doubling of his character in *Un chien andalou*, itself predicated on the doubling of the characters in his previous films. The two selves of *Un chien andalou* are patterned on two of his main roles, that of the young lover, and that of the rebel-criminal. And that doubling underscores while excessively magnifying his star persona, which combines normality and a rejection of that normality.

The doubling generates the feeling of the uncanny, that which is both familiar and yet also strange. The double, or doppelgänger, is a key feature of the uncanny, which Freud relates to the fear of death: once a narcissistic projection of the ego in the form of spirits or the soul, and 'an assurance of immortality' to use Freud's words in his essay on 'The uncanny', the double becomes, as he puts it, 'the uncanny harbinger of death' (Freud 1955: 235). He also relates it to the capacity for self-observation, later defined by him as the super-ego. Audiences of *Un chien andalou* would have recognized the familiar, made strange by excess: the rolled-up ecstatic eyes and the

gouged out eyes of the final shot are versions of the amorous gaze of the noble young lover; the frenetic pursuits are an excessive version of his normal although slightly stiff-armed gait, informed in *Un chien andalou*, as they had been to some extent in *Les Deux timides*, by the performances of comic actors such as Chaplin, Keaton and Sennett, for whom, particularly Keaton, Batcheff had very publicly professed his admiration.

The uncanny for Freud was a resurgence of animistic mental activity, something which he himself would not necessarily have valorized, unlike the surrealists. Hence the paradox of Batcheff as exemplified in *Un chien andalou*: the film is a return to primitive modes of feeling, combining elements of reality and unreality, in an attempt to achieve surreality. Batcheff's persona more generally articulates the same sensibility, with the same kind of consequences it had for Artaud: a feeling of living on the edge, of not inhabiting the body, of being someone else, of being a mere performance of masculinity. Batcheff, we are suggesting, is typical of a crisis in the male body which we see in other art-forms, but not typically in the other *jeunes premiers* of the period. This is no doubt because unlike Batcheff they did not mix with the avant-garde of the time, and therefore do not appear to have reflected on themselves in quite the way that Batcheff did. They were merely pin-ups, all surface; Batcheff is a pin-up wracked underneath by doubt, conflict, and inexpressibility; the familiarity of the *jeune premier* stereotype is shot through with the darker shadows and the anxiety of the alien doppelgänger.

Batcheff as pin-up is related to the uncanniness of the mannequin (as are the automaton and the doll). Foster links the mannequin to the Romantic ruin so as to explain how they tend to work together in surrealist practice: 'As the Bretonian pairing of the mannequin and the ruin implies, the mechanical-commodified and the outmoded are dialectically related: the mechanical-commodified produces the outmoded through displacement, and the outmoded in turn defines the mechanical-commodified as central' (1993: 126). Batcheff is both outmoded as Romantic *jeune premier*, and, by the same token, commodified as star and as replicable *jeune premier*. The 'vacancy' we have defined as his distinguishing feature renders him even more like a mannequin, we might argue, than his fellow *jeunes premiers*, with the possible exception of Jaque Catelain. Even Batcheff's turn to comedy in *Les Deux timides* and *Un chien andalou*, although arguably a break with the outmoded, is nonetheless, like any counter-cinema, dependent on what preceded it for us to understand it fully. Moreover, his Keatonesque performance with stiff walk and stiff arms, in both of those films, merely reinforces the mannequin-like effect of his persona.

As Bellmer said in a wonderfully apt statement, 'the body is like a sentence that invites us to rearrange it' (in Foster 1993: 103); and like Bellmer's dolls, we would suggest that Batcheff rearranged his persona through a variety of narratives, chosen by him, to perpetuate two terms that Foster usefully links: aura and anxiety. Like Bellmer's dolls, Batcheff consciously disarticulated his persona, 'evacuating' it, leaving behind the uncanny shell, the automaton-mannequin with the vacant gaze, the residue (see figure 9). That residue is both feminine and convulsive, desire exploding convention, to recall Artaud's views above. Foster explains how the surrealists projected aura and anxiety onto the figures we have been exploring so as to create the convulsive identity allowing access to the surreal. He also

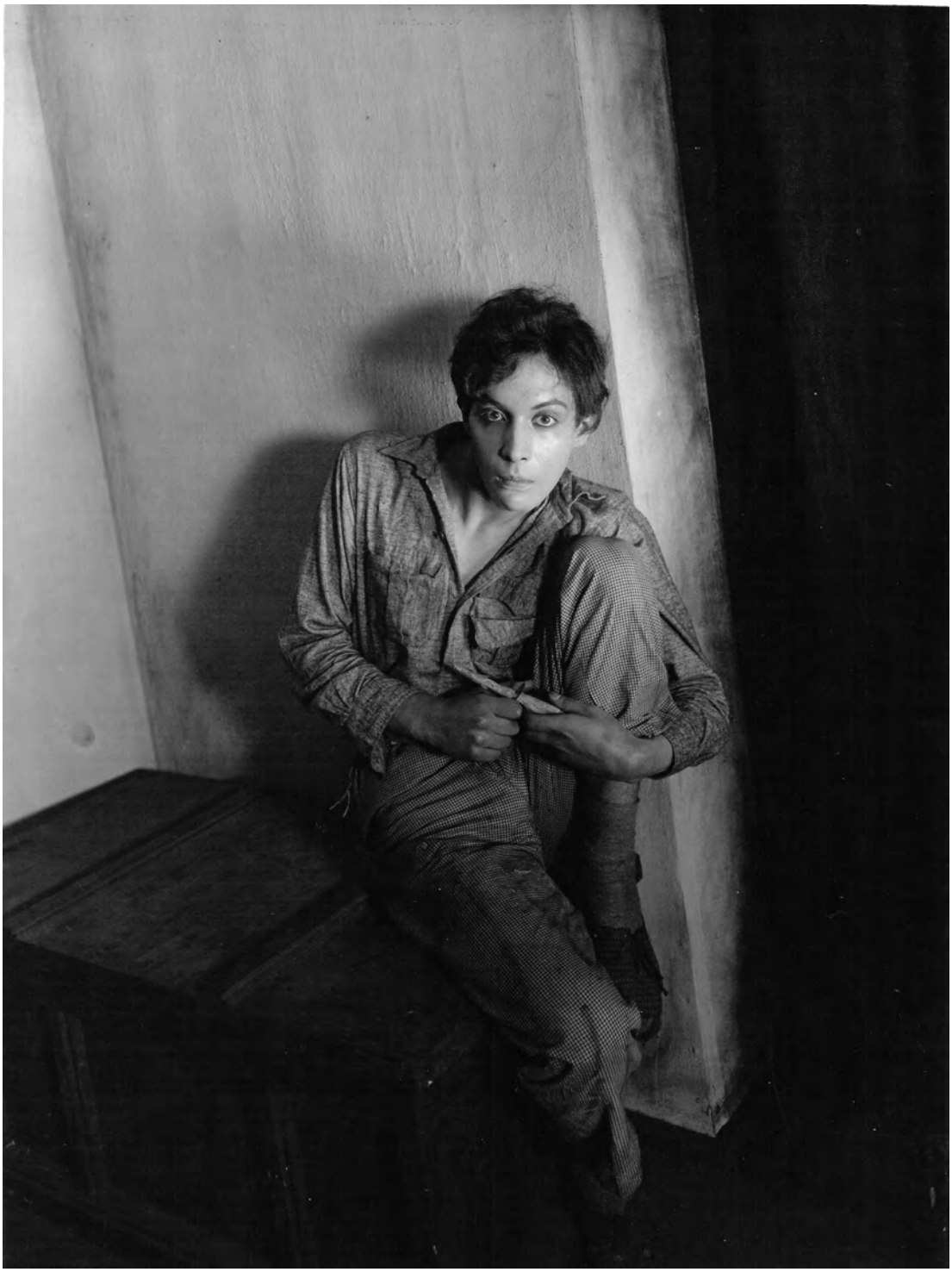

Figure 9: Feu Mathias Pascal *(1925): the haunted look of Scipion the hysteric (Courtesy of the Bibliothèque du Film, Paris).*

points out how the figures we have been referring to are generally feminine in surrealism, as if the other within, for the male poet, is an elemental femininity, with masculinity but an impotent mask, like make-up hastily applied at the surface. This is all the more the case when we remember that the figure determining the notion of beauty for Breton is feminine, and, like Artaud's view of pure thought, predicated on barbarous desire.

We have explored how doublings and splittings inform Batcheff's star persona: fatalist and enterprising; sensitive and savage; French and Russian; masculine and feminine. These criss-cross and form the texture of Batcheff's performance. Batcheff, who frequented the surrealists more than he did his fellow actors, knew perfectly well what Breton meant by the definition of surrealism as the combination of two distant realities, and he put that definition into practice in his performance style. The doublings and splittings we have identified are not organized in binary configurations, as the preceding list undoubtedly suggests. They are a fluid network, best described in the same terms as one of Batcheff's first roles, in *Feu Mathias Pascal*: hysterical convulsions. Those convulsions underpin all of his roles, although they are much more evident in *Un chien andalou* (see figure 10).

Hysteria was a key surrealist interest in the mid-1920s. The last sentence of *Nadja* says 'Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or not at all' (Breton 1988: 753,

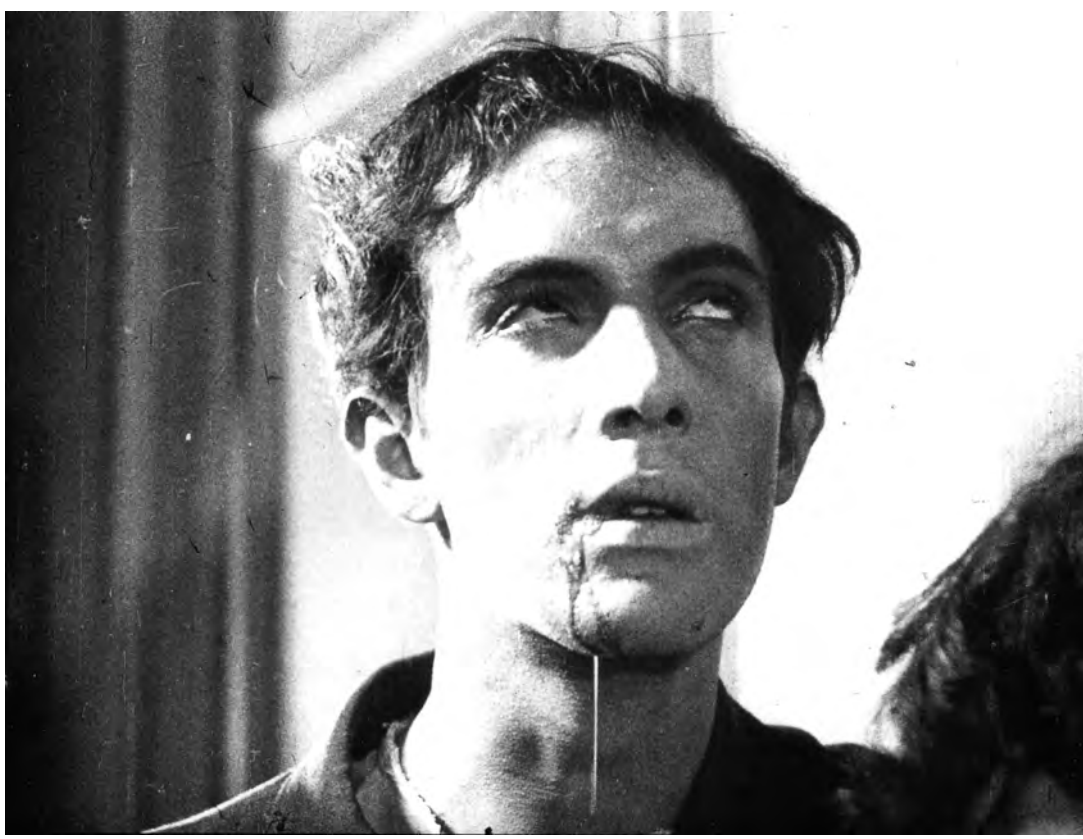

Figure 10: Un chien andalou *(1929): Batcheff hysterisized and othered (Courtesy of the Bibliothèque du Film, Paris)*

his emphasis). The idea was taken up by Breton a few years later in an article entitled 'La beauté sera convulsive', where he wrote that 'Beauty will be erotic-veiled, exploding-fixed, magic-circumstantial' (Breton 1992: 687), the middle epithet, '*explosante-fixe*' being illustrated by a Man Ray photograph of a faceless woman dancing with her skirt caught swirling around her (1992: 683). We would like to suggest that the *explosante-fixe* is emblematic of Batcheff's persona and trajectory. It encapsulates the femininity of the *jeune premier*, as well as the paralysis and passivity of cliché, the 'arrested motion of a body become an image' (Foster 1993: 27). And it is an exemplary illustration of what Elizabeth Bronfen calls the 'knotted subject', 'the snarled knot of memory traces, which as a wandering foreign body haunts the psyche' (Bronfen 1998: xiii), and which she considers to be less a symptom of repressed femininity than a mark of deep cultural shifts manifesting the vulnerability of the symbolic, of identity, and of course of the body itself.

Breton's *explosante-fixe* also indicates the struggle by Batcheff to shake free of fixity, to explode the constraints in a convulsive frenzy of activity, to turn the inanimate mannequin, the lifeless automaton, into its ill-defined agonist, ultimately the writer-director that Batcheff longed to be. What Breton's position leads to is both an explosive tension and a disarticulation. That disarticulation is writ large onto Batcheff's body. His body is, to reprise Bellmer's statement, with all the ambiguities it might suggest of imprisonment and punishment, a *rearranged sentence*. Batcheff articulates a transitional masculinity, caught between a reactive post-(WWI)war idealism, expressed most clearly in the sanitized ephebe, and a newer pre-(WW2)war masculinity, that of the proletarian man of action, exemplified by Albert Préjean and Jean Gabin.

That this could only be achieved in a convulsive moment of comic violence tells us much about the period, but also much about the nature of masculinity more generally.

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Institution:

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I confirm that this essay is submitted in its original unrevised form, and that it is all my own work.

Signature:

Date:

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